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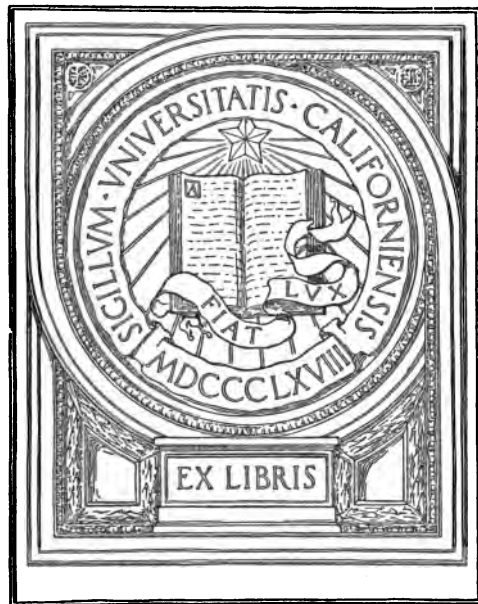
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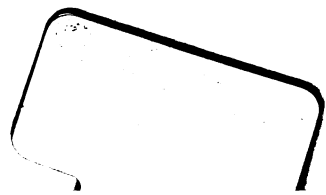
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FARMING



FARMING



BY

RICHARD KENDALL MUNKITTRICK

ILLUSTRATED BY

ARTHUR BURDETT FROST

UNIV OF
CALIFORNIA



NEW YORK

HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE

1892

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TO VIRU
ALBROTHAO

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FARMING



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I HAD always had a wild ambition to be a farmer, and be far from the hurly-burly of metropolitan life. Of farming I knew nothing but what I had heard from people who delighted in ridiculing its independence, as well as in looking at it from a serious standpoint, in order to prove it a comic occupation. I knew very well that Horace and Washington had tilled the soil, and that it would be nobler to farm with them than to ridicule farming with a number of well-meaning bookkeepers. I had frequently stood before print-shops, and noticed the steel engraving of the children in the impossible raiment gathering apples, which, while on the bough, were all outside the leaves to make a rich display. If such golden prosperity can shine on a steel engraving, I often thought, what must it be in reality?

My friends, who delight in jesting on the subject of farm life, always made it a point to depict the farmer's independence by giving an unhallowed description of the amount of labor he had to perform daily—or rather daily and nightly, for they claimed his work was never half done. If any one could detect any independence in that, they would like to see it. A man going out in a thunder-shower to find a stray cow by lightning at midnight, and getting lost himself, was a familiar picture of the farmer. Allusions to his boots, so rigid that the insteps were inflexible, were also freely indulged in.



I argued that the farmer had some independence in that he was always at home under his own vine and apple-tree, that he didn't have to rise with the lark to catch a train, and that when age came along he wouldn't be thrust aside as unavailable timber by an employer who would make room for a son-in-law. "Suppose he does feed the pigs by starlight?

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Is that any worse than your remaining at the office all night to find the seven cents necessary to balance the books?"



I never wanted to be what may be termed a merchant farmer. By merchant farmer I mean the man who sells all the delicacies he raises and lives on pork. My idea was to sell the pork and live on the spring chickens.

I had lived in a small country place before. Here every man was what might be called a polite far-

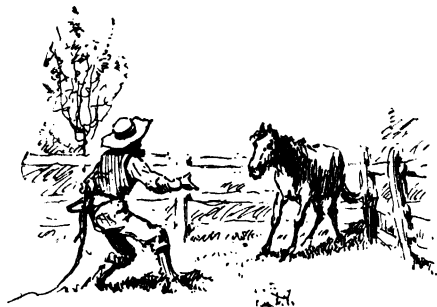
mer. He had his farming done for him, while he attended to a more lucrative business in the city. The man who owned a valuable herd of cattle, and sold milk—just to pay him for the fun he was having—was facetiously known as the banker milkman, while his neighbor was equally well known as the dry-goods rose-grower. It was never my dream to farm for money. I only wanted a living, as that was all I could get out of anything else. In such a position a panic would affect me no more than a dust cloud would a hen, and I could smoke my corn-cob pipe of peace; and playfully count the spots on the pig, and never think of the momentous question, "Whither are we drifting?"

The things known as the most difficult to raise I would leave alone. I would go in largely for apples, because they are raised more by the tree than the farmer. In fact, the tree could not stop bearing if it tried. If I had more apples



than I could use, I could exchange them for something else; and if I should fail in this, I could dry them; and if the trees should die, they would still be eligible for the iron dogs of peace.

The worst thing to be contended with would be the failure of the crops. But even if the crops should fail, I could still fall back on the chickens, providing, of course, they should not be stolen during the night.



I could guard against such a calamity by having the hens sleep in a high tree, and locating a mastiff under it. I had already learned that there are hens and hens; that the hen that is supreme on the table is not always the most prolific layer, and that certain specimens that are famous for their laying qualities are as dry as bone on the table. I concluded that the better plan would be to keep the hens of the dry meat. Then I

would have all the eggs I could eat; and when it came to the prandial part of the business, I could fricassee the chickens, with a duck interpolated for moisture.

Ah, what a peaceful, happy life! What an ideal existence! What a smooth, meandering river of rippling joy! To be able to live without dressing to look like a fashion plate. To be free to retire at 8 P.M., and not have to sit up until 11 for fear of some one calling.

Phillada was as much carried away with the idea as I was myself. To be sure, it would cut us off from the theatres and art galleries, but we could have a picture-gallery around us all the year, and enjoy our pictures in the various phases they would undergo through the changes of the seasons. If a Corot cost ten thousand dollars, what a boon to have an acre of Corots for two hundred dollars, and no extra expense for frames!



The men working in the potato-patch, against the gathering shadows of the after-glow, would be a Millet etching of endless joy; and when that indignitary known as the hired man should be called upon to capture the horse in the clover-patch, the lively actions of the pair would be a Bonheur with pleasant variations.

"But there is one thing I must do first of all."



"What is that?" asked Phillada.

"I must have a doctor order me to try it. If we go from preference, we shall be laughed at, especially if we should return. But if it be simply a question of health, it will be self-preservation, and the sympathy of our friends will be lavished upon us. And then,

should we return, we can say we were stricken with malaria, and came back for the same reason that we went, namely, health. This sound argument can be garnished with jokes, such as an account of the girl's sweeping the snow-drifts out of the farm bedroom after every storm, and of the wind careering through the knot-holes in the floor, and agitating the carpet into gentle ripples, after the manner of a theatrical ocean."

That morning I went down town dreaming of cows wading through silver brooks in the silhouette of the spreading elm, of breezes swaying festoons of golden honeysuckle on the front porch, of bees droning in the drowsy garden, of butterflies tilting on hollyhocks of every color, of the corn rustling in sunny fields, and of the bobolink pouring forth his soul while wandering, fancy free, above the fragrant clover.

On the way up town, I dropped in on the doctor.

"I see," he said. "A sedentary occupation, and no exercise. The thing you need is not medicine, but an out-door life. If you could get out of town, where you could work in the garden an hour or two every day, you would be a new man in a month."

"I have always had a wish to be an amateur farmer," I replied, with a laugh.

"Go and be one," he said; "and you will be all right."

I never paid more cheerfully for anything in my life than I did for that advice, and I walked home so briskly that no one would have suspected that I was about to do anything for my health.

“What did the doctor say was the matter with you?” asked Phillada.

“Nothing,” I replied; “but I’ve got to go to the country for it.”

We never before experienced such happiness in our flat as this prospect of getting out of it.



II

IT is not always the easiest matter to decide how to go about a thing after you have made up your mind to do it. Every one knows where to go for the best Spanish olives, or the finest hats; but no one that dispenses farms seems to have a better reputation for reliability than any one else. The papers are generally supplied with the cards of people who would like to sell first-class farms on terms to suit the purchaser, but they are apt to be misleading as regards fidelity to facts. The purling crystal stream that meanders over beds of golden gravel, upon inspection, turns out to be

too shallow for ducks, and to furnish a cress which generates typhoid fever. The fine out-buildings seem to retain their standing attitude by the merest chance, and to satisfy the beholder that cattle should be kept outside of them for fear of their falling on them. The sumptuous farm-house itself is usually a ram-



bling structure, heated by stoves, if the stoves are sufficiently powerful. Aside from these facts I knew nothing of farming.

At the suggestion of Phillada I went at once to a news-stand and purchased a morning paper.

"We had better go about it at once," she said; "for fear of changing our minds."

"I cannot stay here," I replied, solemnly, "when the doctor says I should go to the country. It is a duty I owe to you and Philip."

"There is another thing," she went on, "and that is this—we must give the place a name, no matter what kind of place it is. I propose we call it Dove's Nest, or Barberry Bower."

"Very pretty names," I replied, "if either should embrace the character of the place. But suppose they should not?"

"It will make no difference. It will look nice on the note-paper, and will inspire our city friends with an idea of our good-fortune. As long as they don't see the place, and it is not likely that they can ever be coaxed out; it will strike them as being lovely."

"But suppose they should come out some time when it is too hot to stay in the city—then what?"

"Then we can tell them that the name was bestowed ironically, for the sake of a joke, and to ridicule the idea of naming places at all."

And this is how we came to name our place Dove's Nest.

By this time the paper was spread out on the table, and we began to examine the advertisements. There were all kinds of farms, on the easiest possible

terms. A sheep farm I did not care for, on the ground that neither of us was partial to mutton. A dairy farm did not strike me favorably, as I was already too round-shouldered from bending over my writing to warrant me in churning.

"Here is just what we want."

"What is it?" I asked, delightedly.

"It is a farm that the owner would be willing to exchange for city property. When a farmer wants to do that, you may rest assured that he is very anxious to be rid of his farm."

"Doubtless you are right," I exclaimed; "but I have no city property to offer."

"That has nothing to do with it," she replied, tapping the floor lightly with her slipper. "I think the best thing for you to do is to go out and look at the place."

On the following morning I purchased an excursion ticket for Cranberry Corners, the nearest station to Dove's Nest. I enjoyed the ride very much, as it took me through a farming country. At every station I noticed there were nothing but farmers standing around, looking at noth-



ing in particular, and seeming to be fairly stupid from content and lack of care. This, I concluded, was a proof of the farmer's independence, which, before, I was unable to appreciate. If he can work a farm, and still spend half his time at the railroad station, and retire for the night at 8 P.M., he, indeed, enjoys an ideal existence. I was disturbed in these optimistic visions of a bucolic existence by two men who boarded the train at Bulrush Centre, and took a seat just behind me.

"I tell you," said the first man, "if you ever settle out here, you want to keep away from Swellmore. If the local dealers once get a mortgage on you, you're gone."

"Didn't you live in Swellmore at one time?" asked the second man.

"Yes; for seven years."

"Why did you stay so long?"

"I stayed two years because I liked it, and five because I couldn't get out."

This shattered my popular metropolitan belief that it only costs five hundred dollars per annum to live in the country.

"Did you hear about old Bill Freeman's bad luck last spring?" asked the first man.

"No. What happened to him?"

"Why, all his ducks and geese were swept away in a freshet—never recovered one of them."

I made a memorandum in my mind never to keep ducks unless upon a hill-top. I would enclose them in an ordinary chicken run, and allow them to swim in a trough,

which I would fill every morning by means of a garden hose. This would keep the ducks within easy reach, and prevent their straying playfully away to lay eggs on the adjoining farm.

I might have learned more from the men sitting behind me, but just then the conductor shouted, "Cran-berry Cor-ners!"



I stepped off the train and over to the only store in the place in quest of information.

"Can you direct me to Dove's Nest?" I inquired of the neck-whiskered proprietor, in my jubilation forgetting that he would not know the place by the name Phillada had selected for it.

"The which?" he inquired.

"W. L. Stoker's farm, I mean."

He led me to the door, and said: "You want to go down that road a mile and a half, until you come to a big oak; then turn to your left and walk down the turnpike two miles, and you will see a little white house. That's where Lem Sikes lives. Lem will tell you where Bill Stoker's is."

"If I could find a conveyance," I said.

This suggested an important business mission.

"One o' them lawyer chaps a-comin' up to foreclose on Bill?" he asked, as he stroked his whiskers in deep meditation.

"Oh, no! I want to look at his place."

"One o' the finest farms around these parts." Then he paused for a mo-

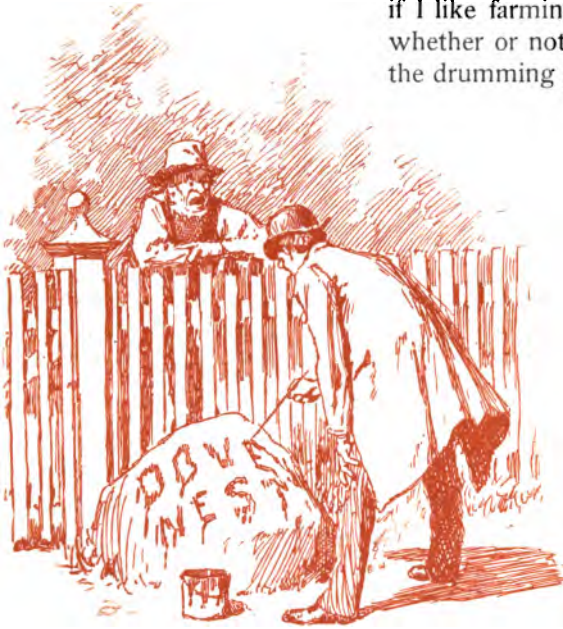
ment, as though there was nothing more to be said on the subject. "I'm goin' down that way pretty soon to deliver some goods, and you can hop on," he continued.

In a short time we were on the way to Dove's Nest. The grocer was so anxious to know just what I was going to do that he was too full for utterance. He was even so kind as to drive me the whole of the distance, and to introduce me to Mr. Stoker.

Mr. Stoker was picturesque in blue overalls and one suspender. Although he wanted to part with his farm, it was not because he was dissatisfied with it. He had recently purchased a windmill from an Illinois concern, and had done so much in the way of praising it that others about the place followed his advice and bought one. This so pleased the Illinois concern that it offered him a good commission to travel in its interest. This, of course, satisfied me that I could make my own terms.



"Suppose I rent the farm just as it stands, stock and all, for a year, with a view of purchasing or giving up at the end of that time? That will be long enough for me to ascertain if I like farming, and for you to learn whether or not you are endowed with the drumming gift."



He ran his fingers through his iron-gray hair and filled the air with bran. Then he said, "I'll take your offer."

We walked over the place, and he explained everything. The wind-mill I liked very much, because it gave the place a Dutch effect. The pigeons were circling in the sun about the walnuts, and the white ducks were floating listlessly on the silent pools in chaste armadas.

"How soon can I take possession?" I asked, in an outburst of heart-felt enthusiasm.

"Next Monday," he replied.

I then borrowed a pot of black paint from him, and on a large stone at the gateway painted "Dove's Nest," as a surprise for Phillada.

That night we sat up in the flat until after midnight, talking the matter over, and on the following Monday our effects rolled gracefully from the flat, the movers, with their usual contempt for care and the elements, having packed the tin and china ware on the bottom of the truck, and the plush-covered furniture and mattresses on top.

Phillada tripped lightly on, holding Philip by the hand, wishing, as I afterwards told her, to impress the public with the idea that she was not even personally acquainted with poor me, who trudged on behind, holding in my left hand a cage containing a petulant parrot, and in my right a basket about two sizes too small for the tomcat within.



III

WHEN we arrived at Dove's Nest our joy knew no bounds. Neither did the dog's. The dog, poor fellow, had had the misfortune of being born in the bosom of a bustling community, with whose ways and surroundings he had no sympathy. The compass of his daily exercise was the back-yard, up and down which he would run in very much the manner employed by a man rowing on a pool of water very little longer than his craft. It may be superfluous to say that he would start from the kitchen door at such a pace that his maximum speed was attained at about the middle of the yard. Then he would slacken his strides lest peradventure he come in contact with the fence with sufficient force to drive his nose back into his eyes, and give him the cranial contour of the pug.

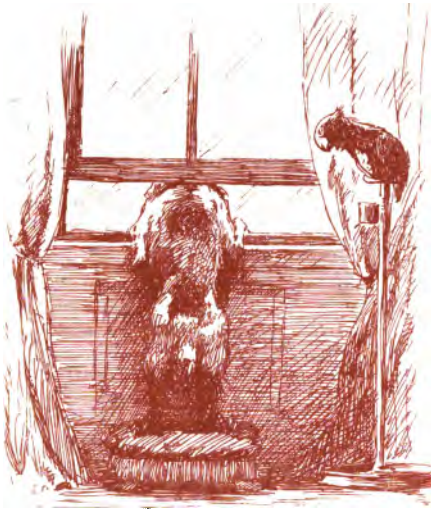


When we moved into a flat he was even more unhappy, because for a long time his only open-air exercise was enjoyed upon the window-sill. Being a water-spaniel, he would lie on the same window-sill on rainy days and catch on his head the longed-for water, that he would never wantonly shake off, but rather allow to become a part of him through absorption. It would, perhaps, be cruel to dwell further upon

these facts setting forth the circumscribed liberty and conditions of Spot—so called in contradistinction to Rover, because the flat would not

permit him to rove, but compelled him to remain in one place.

Consequently Spot's joy knew no bounds when we all arrived at Dove's Nest. A few days later, while sitting on the porch with Phillada watching the wind-tossed dandelions that made the sunny meadow an undulating cloth of gold, out popped Spot, who began running up and down at a great rate. But it struck me as being strange that he described no wild, mad circles in his rapturous flights. He would run on a straight line for about fifty feet, then stop suddenly and wheel about as though on a pivot, and return to the starting-point only to repeat the exercise.



"Isn't that very odd?" I asked, as I watched Spot.

"Not at all," replied Phillada. "It is said that the liberated prisoner has pleasant memories of his cell; then why shouldn't Spot remember the flat, and run its length on the ground and turn around in the only way it would allow?"

"But why in the middle of his course does he dart out of it in a short semicircle?" I asked.

"That," replied Phillada, "is probably to escape the partition between the dining-room and parlor."

This explanation seemed satisfactory. I was warned to be very careful in my efforts at duck-culture by Mr. Van Sickle, a neighboring farmer, who used to drop in occasionally and fill me with gratuitous advice and choice bits of agricultural reminiscence.



"Look out for the bull-frogs!" he would exclaim, "look out for the bull-frogs—they's the boys as'll soak 'em!"

He meant by this that, as the ducklings were swimming about on the bosom of the pond like so many gold-

en lilies, the bull-frogs would grab them by the legs and cause them to disappear abruptly and forever. He would then describe the maternal

grief of the hen as she ran about on the shore counting her little ones on her talons to ascertain if they were all there.

I did not allow Mr. Van Sickle to dissuade me from the experiment of raising ducks, however, but thanked him for his timely advice, and told him I would be only too thankful for any he had to offer on anything appertaining to the divine art of farming.

"But the bull-frogs'll soak 'em; the bull-frogs'll soak 'em!" he repeated as he walked away.

Notwithstanding his statement and admoni-



tion, I set several hens on duck-eggs that very day, and about seventy-five per cent. of them saw the light at the end of the current moon.



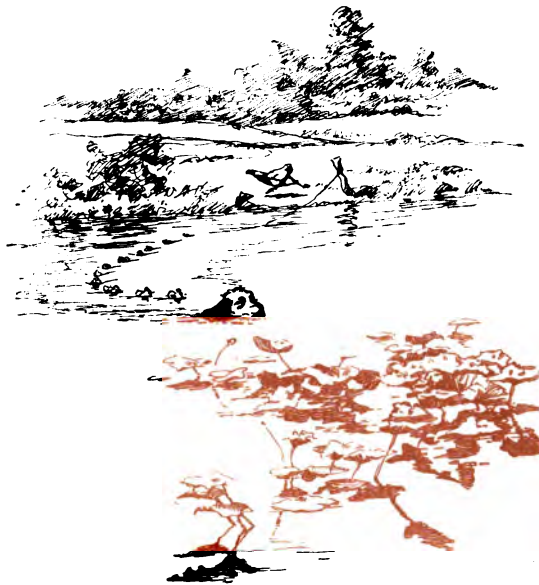
"Ha, ha!" thought I, as I saw them enter the pond in spite of the warnings of the maternal ancestor, "what would Mr. Van Sickle say should he see what I am about to do?"

I then sent Spot into the water with them, and a most excellent chap-eron he made. I kept him chained in a dry place all day, and only gave him his liberty when the ducklings moved in Indian file to the pond. The little fuzzy amphibians followed him affectionately, seeming to know by instinct their probable fate as set down by Mr. Van Sickle.

This plan worked all right for something like a week. One day while Spot was swimming at the head of his yellow fleet, the Van Sickle dog suddenly appeared on the top of an opposite hill, capering on the rim of the horizon in frenzied glee. It was then that Spot, marvelling at but not divining the cause thereof, left the pond so swiftly that he forgot to shake himself upon landing. It was then that about half the ducklings disappeared to create post-prandial raptures for the slimy denizens of the mud.

After Phillada had laughed at me for thinking I knew more about

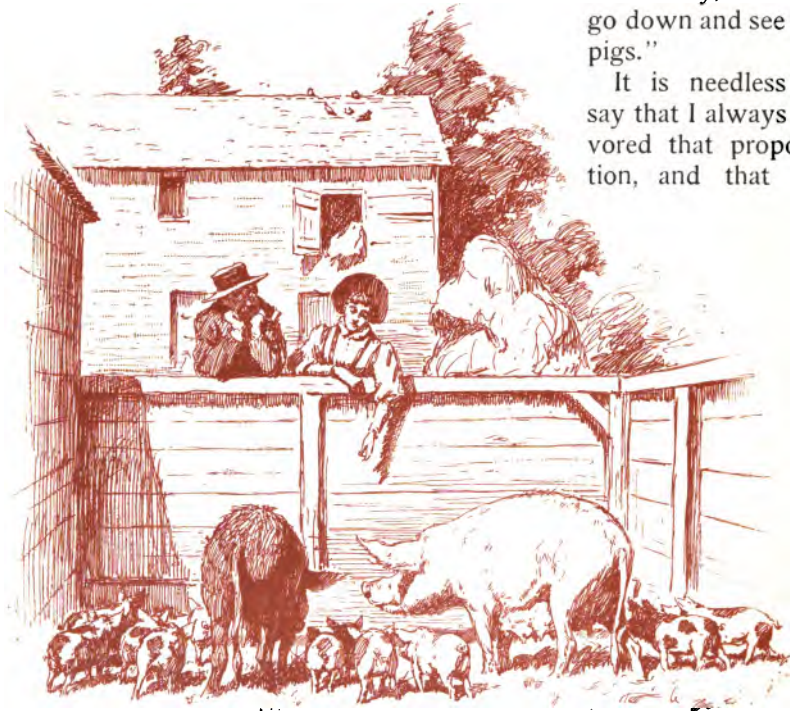
duck-culture than a professional farmer, I got mad, and said: "If Spot shall chaperon those ducks again he will do it on the end of a long rope that will make his escape impossible. And if that works not, then will I secure the ducks in the chicken-run, and all the water they'll get will be taken internally from a saucer, even if the dry weather causes them to warp out of shape, and break into a cobweb of airy cracks."



IV

THERE was perhaps nothing else on the farm in which we found a keener spiritual delight than in the pigs; and when the "cares that infest the day" had gathered themselves together and gat them hence, and the twilight enamelled the bosom of the pool in which I hoped at some time to cultivate bull-frogs and snapping-turtles, Phillada would say, "Let us go down and see the pigs."

It is needless to say that I always favored that proposition, and that we



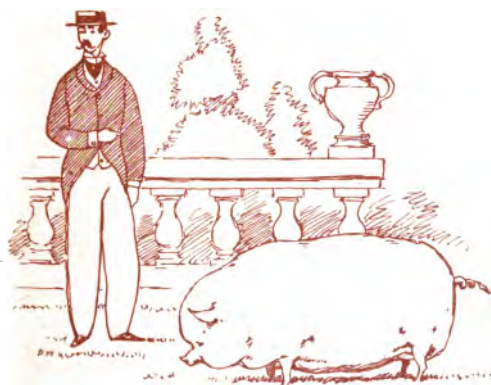
walked down to the pen across the emerald slope, after I had lighted my corn-cob pipe; my love of consistency having caused me to cast away the meerschauum I had smoked in the flat, and to adopt the one that savored of the farm. But I am willing to admit that I clung tenaciously

to the tobacco of the city after I had tried one package of the brand dispensed by the bucolic grocer, who might have acquired a handsome fortune had he but had the forethought to offer it to the public as a moth exterminator.

Our pigs consisted of a large white one with a fierce Russian moustache, and a full-mourning specimen with a goodly litter of young ones, most of which were spotted like playing-cards. Most fondly would they gaze upon us with their cold, porcelain eyes, and wriggle their opera-glass snouts as we approached.

The strangest thing about the adult pigs was their thinness. They were simply scrawny; but we did not particularly object to this, because we preferred our pork lean, and these animals looked as though they would work up into bacon with two layers of lean to one of fat.

It was extremely pleasant to note the affections of the little ones as they lay in a heap, as though woven together like an oval door-mat.



In fact, Phillada was so fond of them that whenever she went to the pen she did not forget to regale each with a lump of sugar. I think if she had not been blessed with a keen sense of the ridiculous, she would have insisted upon tying pink ribbons in their ears, and supplying them with blankets emblazoned with their names in the softest silk. She would never

think of killing one of these sucking-pigs for a Sunday roast, and I never felt like disputing the propriety of allowing them to live on, as I be-



lieved they would shortly become the low-set, broad-gauge pigs—constructed very much after the fashion of the dachshund—that we find in the highest stage of development in the wood-cut of the agricultural paper.

But, alas! we soon learned that the finely rounded pigs that luxuriate in the pages of these journals are no more like the pigs of real life than are the jointless people in the foldless clothes met in fashion plates like the beings we observe moving about in the quick.

In other words, our pigs seemed never to fatten, no matter how much we fed them. I could not understand it at all, although I theorized consider-

ably on the subject. One theory was that they ate so fast that they impaired their digestion. I noticed that the old black one that Philip called the “big black mamma” had a dyspeptic cough, so, after trying various troches in vain, I called in Mr. Van Sickle, the farmer.

He looked as grave as a prime-



minister as he eyed the swine through his brass-rimmed spectacles. He looked in the boar's mouth, which he pried open with a bean-pole as though to ascertain if his tusks were composed of vegetable ivory. After he had made a careful examination, he calmly admitted that he was as much at sea regarding their condition as he would have been had I called him in to prescribe for a fat greyhound.

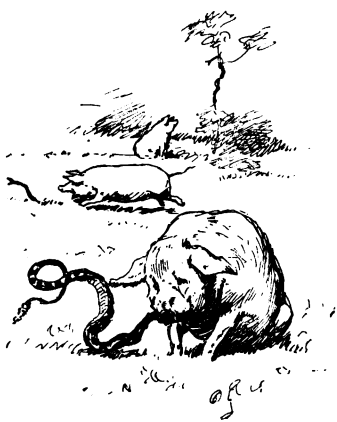
"I guess," said he, "I'd let them go rattlesnakin' fer a while; that 'll do 'em good. Nothin' better for pigs than rattlesnakes. You see, when the snake gets ready to spring, the pig puts his hoof right around him, like a pair of pincers, and down he goes into the pig head first."

"What effect does that have on the pork?" I asked.

"What effect?" repeated Mr. Van Sickle; "it makes it as good as corn-fed, and it's along sight cheaper. Besides, it does away with the rattlesnakes. Why, when I was farming down in Missouri, about twenty years ago, they used to think rattlesnake pork the best going. A man

raised on rattlesnake pork, they used to say, was proof against the sting of that snake, and that no matter how hard he drank he could not ketch *delirium tremens*."

I had the pigs turned out to wander at will at Mr. Van Sickle's request, and as we walked away he returned to his mutton, or rather to his pork, as follows:



"I tell ye them was pigs as was pigs down in Missouri. Did you ever see a fat pig?"

"I did," I replied.

"Well, them pigs was so fat they could not see. Sometimes they would walk against a stone wall and stun themselves. I have often seen them sound asleep while walking around. The crows were the things that bothered them."

Mr. Van Sickle commenced to chuckle. I asked him what amused him.

"Those pigs," he said. "Why, they were so fat that they could not keep the crows off when they landed on their backs to feed on their fat. A crow would drive his bill right to his eyes into the pig's back, and never withdraw it until surfeited. Sometimes a pig would roll over on his back for relief, and then he could not regain his feet. While in this helpless position, and almost suffocating, other crows would attack him, and drive him wild. We finally employed a boy to watch the pigs, and when a crow would light on one of them the boy would rush in and fan him off with a pole."

Mr. Van Sickle then abandoned his reminiscent vein and told me I would never have any more trouble with my pigs; and I did not, for I never saw them again. Whether they kept growing thinner until they vanished in the air, or were stolen, is still a mystery. And about a week later I suppose I evidenced an unconscious contempt for the American hog when I sent to the store for a side of English breakfast bacon.



V

SO far our farming had not been what might be called eminently successful, but we were not entirely discouraged. Phillada's smile was the rainbow that followed the storm which came through the roof and depressed the kitchen fire and the Maltese cat. Her words of sympathy made me hopeful when the crows descended and plucked the sprouting corn from the earth, just after I had hoed it once, and in so doing made myself as round-shouldered as a shoemaker, and bent myself forward to



such an extent that I was afraid to straighten up lest peradventure I break.

While debating in my mind the question "whether it is harder to drop potatoes or to pick them up," Phillada began to laugh, and said,

"I think I have discovered why we are not more successful."

And when I asked her to tell me, she replied,

"Why, because we do not take an agricultural paper!"

It struck me that perhaps she was right; and I became so fully convinced of this, upon mature reflection, that in the course of a day or two I subscribed for the *Plough and Harrow*, a monthly journal devoted to the interests of farming.



This paper was really a great joy to me, for if it was lacking as regards solid information, it was overflowing with wholesome amusement. It made a specialty of letters from farmers designed to show others how to do certain things successfully in a new way, whose basis of value was its economy of time and labor. One farmer would tell how he made a beautiful eel-pot of an old stove-pipe, and a beehive of an ancient milk-can, while another would disclose the name of a certain homœopathic pill that cured his cow of garget. I noticed also the names of our old time-honored correspondents *Veritas* and *Fair Play* in the columns of the *Plough and Harrow*, though I never dreamed that they ventured into the field of agriculture.

I learned from them how to plant grass-seed in a strong wind, and was cautioned against the absurdity of setting the drum-head cabbage beside the trumpet-flower, though the latter may have been the idle jest of a happy moment.

The illustrations were not masterpieces from an art standpoint, but they were well worth studying. I have forgotten the exact weight and dimensions of a certain sheep, whose name has escaped me, but which we cut out and pinned on the wall to enjoy at our leisure. It had corkscrew curls, and a pensive Hebraic cast of countenance, which inspired us with the idea of calling it the Jewish poetess, although we named it *Susan Bowwow Skat*.

Then there were pictures of cocks with tails like willow draperies, standing in dignified attitudes, and throwing their heads back with martial pride. These were the fowls that any one could enjoy for so much



per setting of eggs.—(See advertisement on inside cover.) The cows were represented as being about the size of oxen, and were so choice in the description that it seemed possible they were covered with French calf-skins and yielded nothing but cream. In fact, the whole paper made

farming seem what might be called a refined joy, an exquisite rapture, and I felt far better off than when following the romantic pursuit of book-keeping.



Even as the clam fritters away his time at high water, so did I luxuriate in the high tide of my joy that didn't know the bounds of a flat or a dingy office, and when anything went wrong I flew to the Plough and Harrow for solace. In its columns I could read much that was instructive

and elevating. There was the story of the good boy with fingers like sausages, and feet so large that they made him tired when he walked, who, in spite of the injunctions of the dyspeptic maternal ancestor in the ging-ham hood, went to one of the great cities to grow up and be a great man. His adventures in the city were without special interest, except that he had a pretty hard time, and learned to appreciate the pleasures of a pastoral career while carrying large clumsy bundles about on the noisy street. Often he thought of



“mother’s gingerbread” and “Aunt Huldys doughnuts” while dining in a coffee-and-cake saloon; and the apple-stand on the street brought to mind the old gnarled greening tree behind the house, where he used to roll in the grass and kick his feet in the air and strike at bumblebees with his felt hat. The story placed these particular “greenings” far



above those found in the city, while it spoke of the dried-apple pies of the farm as a delicacy that no metropolitan caterer could equal. At any rate, he either couldn't stand the city fare, or he discovered that he couldn't rise to a great position just by being good and honest and freckled, so he returned to the ancient roof, and oh! what a jollification there was on that occasion. What avalanches of pie and rivers of cider, etc.

Then there was a poem called "Stick to the Plough, Tom!" which set forth the beauties of farming, and the utter folly of everything else.

Besides, there was a plan for a fifteen-hundred-dollar house, the only important fact concerning the same that was forgotten being that to build a fifteen-hundred-dollar house according to a fifteen-hundred-dollar plan, the builder should have at least five thousand dollars.

In spite of the glowing pictures in the Plough and Harrow, the scheme of farming didn't seem to be paying well, although there was no end of work.

“I’ll tell you what we had better do,” said Phillada.

“What?” I asked.

“So long as it is all work and no money, we might find a man who would be willing to work the place on shares.”

“It is an Irish proposition,” I replied, “but I think we had better act on it.”



VI

WE were not a great while in discovering that farming is often attended with eccentric financial results. It cost us fifty dollars for a ton of fertilizer for the potato lot, and the crop was a failure of the worst kind, while all the time spent in hoeing was time thrown away. Had I been forced to keep up the hoeing much longer, I think I should have re-

duced myself to bone-dust, and suddenly mingled with the fertilizer said to be of the same material.

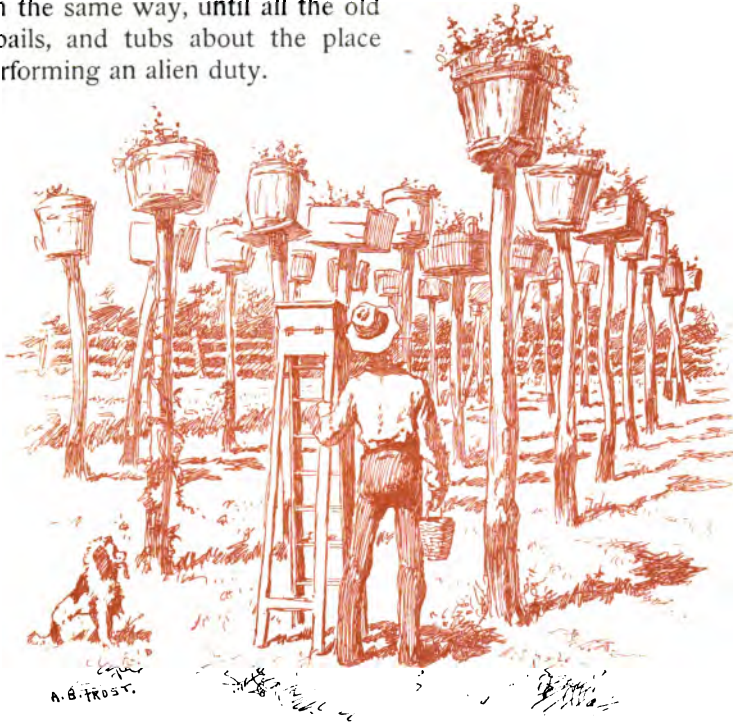
I am willing to admit that the pleasant sensations of a bondholder were mine when I sat down to eat tomatoes that cost about twenty-five cents each. Owing to the attentions of the potato-bug, who, in spite of his name, seems to be fond of everything that is green, except, perhaps, paint, my first tomato plants were eaten while yet in blossom. Through this loss I conceived

the idea of planting a second lot in butter-tubs nailed on top of posts well smeared with a resinous substance calculated to entangle the feet of the potato-bug and fill him with consternation and despair.

Many other table luxuries, such as pease, pole beans, lettuce, etc., I



raised in the same way, until all the old boxes, pails, and tubs about the place were performing an alien duty.



Phillada said if we returned to the city she was going to have just such a garden, if she had to run the butter-tubs along clothes-lines on pulleys.

This system, which we called farming in the air, I hoped never to experience, as my chief object in farming was to be able to live in the country. Yet I could not help feeling amused as I pictured to myself the farmer, sitting in his flat, hauling on the rope to get the crops close enough to the window to be cultivated with a carving-knife, and watered by a hose fastened to the kitchen faucet.

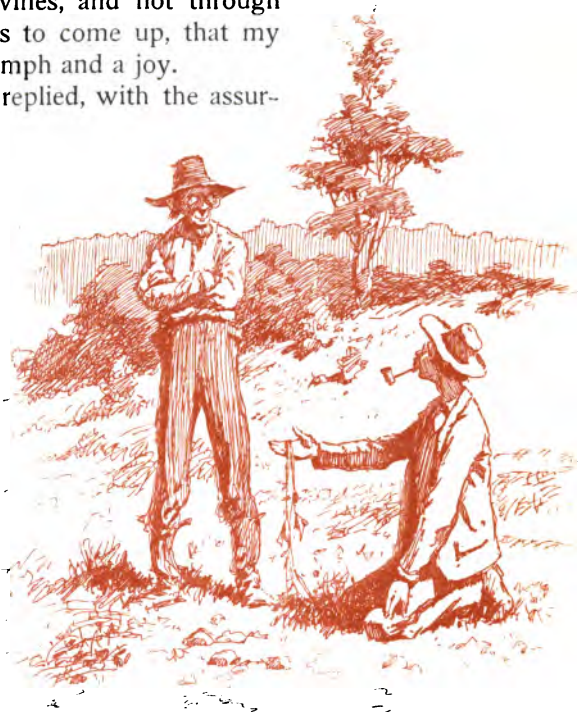
My melons, upon which I depended so largely for Olympian bliss during the panting dog-days, came to naught, the vines having curled up in the early summer and silently drifted away.

If I had raised the melons successfully, and had them purloined by boys, it would have been bad enough; but I didn't even have the satisfaction of meeting disappointment in that way, but in the bitterer form of a reflection on my skill as a gardener.

Mr. Van Sickle consoled me somewhat when he assured me that in all probability the seed was five or six years old when planted. But this consolation was only momentary when I reflected that it was through

the withering of the vines, and not through the failure of the seeds to come up, that my melons were not a triumph and a joy.

Yet Mr. Van Sickle replied, with the assurance of one who has learned from experience, that it was the seeds and nothing else. In fact, nothing I planted seemed to grow right. The carefully watered cucumbers dried up and faded into old-gold and oblivion; the wax beans melted away I know not how; and, in truth, the only things about the place that



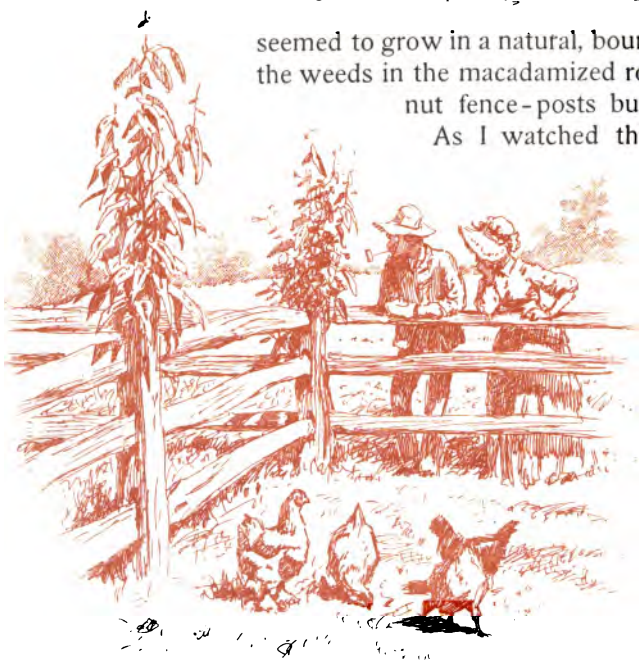
seemed to grow in a natural, bountiful manner were the weeds in the macadamized road, and the chestnut fence-posts but recently set out.

As I watched these rootless posts with great green bunches of leaves growing on them, I had to laugh.

"It is, indeed, a funny fence," I one day remarked.

"Fence?" replied Phillada. "I should call it a hedge."

But I was proud of one thing: I did not



plant the pease that were not in tubs all at once. I planted them about a week apart, that they might not all ripen at the same moment, and begin to spoil after the first picking. This was my proudest achievement. I once had a friend who neglected to do this, and I had read of several others who had been victims of the same mistake. But my shrewdness and foresight were not rewarded by a luxurious succession of



melting mealy marrowfats. I might just as well have planted them at the same time, for the simple reason that they all died together, even while the bees rifled their creamy flowers.

But with the plants growing in the tubs on posts I had better luck, although, as I remarked before, I paid a good price for everything I ate. Yet I felt proud to think I had circumvented the potato-bug, and I laughed often to myself when I pictured his discomfiture, as I stood on a step-ladder watering the precious plants, or gathering a sufficient quantity for dinner from the breezy vines.

The neighbors, who laughed when they saw me arranging the butter-tubs, were beginning to have great respect for me as the discoverer of a

new wrinkle in farming. But I never knew how great it was until one day I saw it described at great length and garnished with illustrations in the columns of the Plough and Harrow. It was evidently the work of a neighbor who had stolen my idea, and ventilated it as his own under a pseudonyme which has escaped me. He told how he came to conceive the idea, how he put it in practice, together with its golden results. I said nothing, knowing that they would all try it in my locality the next year, and would discover that its golden results would be largely illustrated in the amount of gold each vegetable would cost.

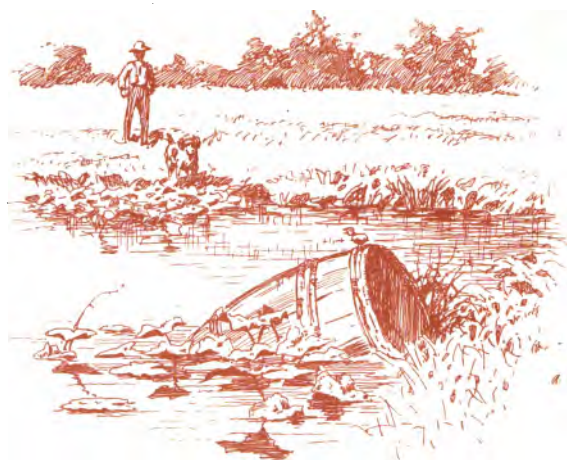
"And while they are eating tomatoes at twenty-five cents apiece, we shall be consuming them at fifteen cents a can, and the pantry will contain a crop that cannot fail."

Suddenly Phillada appeared and interrupted my soliloquy. "The barrel containing the little chickens just rolled into the pond, and they are all drowned!"

"It reminds me of a remark Philip made yesterday," I replied, good-naturedly, for I had become so accustomed to disaster that nothing could ruffle the calmness of my spirit.

"And what did he say?" asked Phillada.

"He said," I replied, "just what this latest catastrophe has proved to be a fact, 'that ducks are boats and chickens are wagons'—one for the water, one for the land."



VII

I ALWAYS knew that the sun played an active part in farming, but not until I got into a farming district did I become aware of the fact that the farmers pay no attention whatever to this important luminary, but rather in their studies of the heavenly bodies honor the moon with their entire attention. In all the places in which I had ever lived before, the moon was not considered, save in the suburbs, where the ever-economical township committee would not permit the electric illumination of the streets on moonlight nights.

But the farmers regarded it so seriously that after a while I began to fancy that to till the earth in triumph one should be versed in the beautiful mysteries of astronomy. Perhaps it was through my ignorance of this branch of learning that I had not yet achieved a victory over the soil. I therefore concluded that the things that should be done under the influence of a wet moon or a dry moon could be best performed by the man who would work the place

on shares. Such a man could tell the nature of a seed by looking at it, and not by consulting the face of the package in which purchased. Had Phillada been blest with this power of discrimination, her little flower-garden at Dove's Nest might have been a thing to go into wildest raptures over. We called it a flower-garden because it was originally intended for one; but it was only a flower-garden in name, inasmuch as the trumpet-flower seeds developed into squashes, the



mignonette into beets, and the hollyhocks into sweet-corn. I cannot remember now just how the other flower seeds turned out, but I do remember that the squashes, beets, and corn that should have been

trumpet-flowers, mignonette, and hollyhocks never reached the stage of development in which those vegetables are capable of filling the dining-room with their steaming incense.

To avoid the repetition of such a catastrophe I thought it time to act upon Phillada's advice, and find a man who could be induced to undertake the management of the farm on shares—a man who could work in harmony with the moon, and cast all necessary horoscopes in a manner unknown

to any but the horny-handed professional.

Even at this day I cannot overcome a wild yearning for vengeance when I think of this man who managed Dove's Nest on shares. Although I made nothing out of the place working it alone, I did not make any more with the assistance of this guileless creature, whose calm, serene countenance inspired confidence in him, and amounted simply to spiritual beauty. I am not at all confident yet that he knew more about farm-work than I did myself, as I never detected him in the act of doing any. But he was full of ideas and advice. He could tell you just how you could turn the swamp into a good potato field by blind draining, and how you could find better results by using certain expensive implements, which would also save labor. In short, he was more



anxious to save labor than anything else, except, possibly, money and time—to sleep. It was probably owing to this weakness that he acknowledged such a strong preference for sulky ploughs, etc. Any kind of implement that contained a nice easy seat upon which he could bob over stones as though in a boat seemed to fill his soul with ineffable ecstasies. If he could but have found an implement with a hammock attachment I think his happiness would have been complete, and he would have performed most of his farming duty in a gentle doze. I have seen him stand and survey a potatoscape or a turnipscape in a most studious manner. Then would he sit down to gain a different



view, that he might survey it more studiously. When once wrapped in one of these potato or turnip studies he seemed like one in a trance, and I doubt very much if anything could have aroused him save the metallic undulations of the far-away dinner-bell.

As I was but experimenting with the farm, and did not own it, I, of course, did not invest very extensively in blind drains or implements. But through the mellifluous arguments and suggestions of this smiling pirate, whose subtle cunning entitled him to consideration as an inspired compromise between the serpent and the plumber—for he was about “the subtlest beast of the field” I ever saw—I was rash enough to lay out a couple of hundred dollars, which I never saw again. When

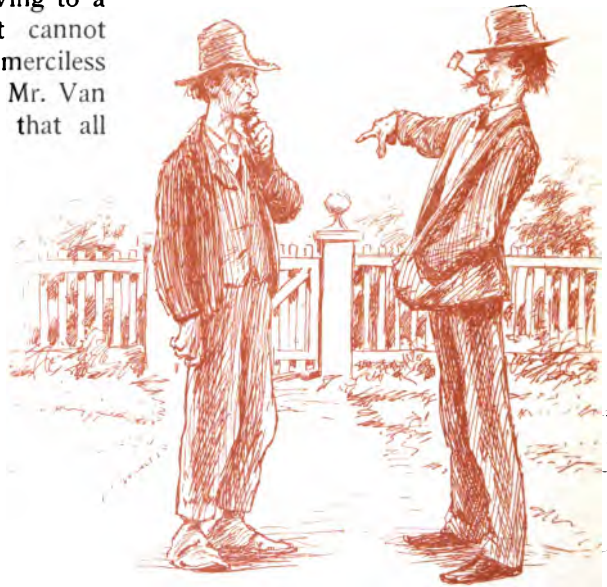


the summer came to an end, so did the engagement of "the subtlest beast of the field."

There was nothing to divide, as, I confidently believe, he had all the gain and I the expense. He looked so crest-fallen and abused when I pointed a bee-line to the gate, as politely as

my feelings would permit, that I for a moment began to imagine that perhaps, after all, I had done him an injustice. I had an expert go over his figures, that appeared to me all right, and found that he had made out of me a sum that I am ashamed to name, owing to a sensitive spirit that cannot wantonly brook the merciless ridicule of friends. Mr. Van Sickle then told me that all good farmers own farms, and only tramp farmers work on shares. He also figured out the commissions he got for ordering implements, and what he must have made out of a surreptitious manipulation of the produce.

He likewise advised me to go to



law, but this I would not listen to, as it takes two to make a lawsuit, and in this affair the defendant was woefully lacking, having long ago passed over the rim of yonder distant hill, and evaporated in the offing like a thin midsummer cloud. But, anyhow, I had got the hawk out of the Dove's Nest.



VIII

AFTER we had ridded ourselves of the man who ran Dove's Nest on shares, with a view to bettering his pecuniary condition—and perhaps ours—we began to feel that there was some golden prosperity in store for us. Everything that had gone wrong we attributed to the gross mismanagement of this horny-handed basilisk, and I concluded that if I should ever deem it expedient to employ another in a like capacity, it



would be an agricultural lecturer—one who could enrich my mind with those theories which when put in practice, by another man whom I could command from the saddle, would result in happy crop and after-math.

While I had no further fear of the elements, so carried away was I by the sunshine of the change, yet I didn't go into ecstasies of joy over their

possibilities. I was still alive to the fancied sensations of manipulating a hoe with one hand while holding an umbrella aloft with the other. Yet it was a matter of indifference to me whether it rained sufficiently hard to destroy the turkeys and preserve the geese, or whether it became so dry that the turkeys would thrive and prosper and the geese suffocate and have



their livers abnormally developed for pâté de foie gras.

"Let the sun pour forth its seething avalanche!" I exclaimed, in the largeness of my joy, while sharpening a lead-pencil with a table knife—my late manager having forgotten to return my pearl-handled penknife, recently borrowed to employ in mending the harness—"let the sun pour forth its scintillating eruption, and I will murmur not, even though it peel the few surviving potatoes in the field, pop the shining corn upon the cob, and split and roast the garden pease until they are in prime condition for negotiation in an open coffee market."

I paced the roadway in front of the house with the feelings of one who has just raised two mortgages at once, and is lost in the ambrosial feelings of real proprietorship. The house seemed a palace that didn't need a coat of paint, although the shingles that extended to the ground were covered with moss of every possible shade of gray and green, and hadn't known an artificial tone for half a century.

"If we ever own a house," said Phillada, studying the moss, "I think that color would be excellent for the dining-room below the picture-moulding, and that for a dado, with a dead-gold vine for variety."



"I think it would be excellent," I replied.

"And what a lovely malachite tone that would be for note-paper," she went on.

"It would also be lovely for a rug or a carriage-horse," I replied, not knowing exactly what I said.

"Oh, it would be just too lovely for anything in a carriage-horse!" she laughed. "If I had a horse of that color, and should wear while driving a China silk of sauce crevisse, don't you think the contrast would be excellent?"

"Indeed I do; I cannot think of anything more artistic, and I shall only be too happy to buy you a China silk of sauce crevisse if—"

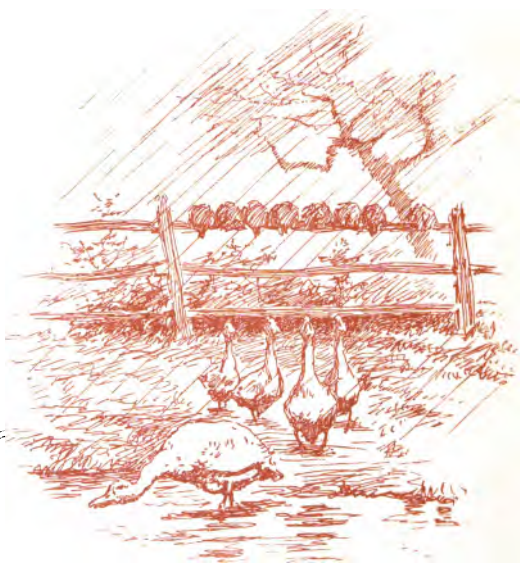
"If what?" she asked, rather suddenly.

"If you will tell me where I can find the malachite steed."

She pretended to be provoked at this, but offered to compromise on a tea gown of the same tint should we ever return to the city.

I then returned to the house and wandered aimlessly about, congratulating myself upon losing, or rather casting adrift, the share-worker, for, considered as a loss, I paradoxically termed him a profitable loss, and his going a happy misfortune.

Never before had the interior of the house appeared so charming and



full of poetry. I went into raptures over the rag-carpet that contained generations of suspenders and other articles of wearing apparel, and lost no time in passing a fitting compliment upon the maker's regard for the sublimity of realism when I noticed on its brindled bosom a button and a suspender buckle. But I quickly withdrew my remarks upon the constructor's fidelity to the principles of realism in art when I learned that the button and suspender buckle in question had simply fallen on the floor from the work-basket in which they belonged.



Another thing about the place that had always filled me with pain now appealed to me as a subject for endless merriment, and I smiled as I perhaps never smiled before, when I leaned against the mantel-piece and regarded the ancient white high hat with the mourning band that was stuffed in a broken pane of the kitchen window.

Through the spectacles of my contented state of mind Henry Clay became beautiful in the cheap print that probably made him homelier than



he was in life, and showed his foot in the background larger than the member in the foreground.

I went forth and fed the horses until I almost killed them, hoping that they might feel as happy as I, and I did the same with the other animals. I felt like filling the watering-pot and sprinkling the geese, when I came across several rows of vegetables that I hadn't observed before. They ran in zigzag courses instead of in straight ones. In fact, I may truthfully say that they tacked all over the ground. I could not help laughing immoderately.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Phillada.

"At those zigzag rows," I replied.

"And what do they mean?" she inquired, with a puzzled look.

"They mean simply this," I said, as I looked at the crooked rows, "that that man's infidelity to the laws of agriculture was largely owing to his fidelity to the glowing flowing bowl."

And then we concluded that if every *départure* of a servant-girl could only bring about the happiness that was ours through the going of the share-worker, this would indeed be a comparatively happy, happy world.



IX

I HAD always looked forward with unfeigned pleasure to the time when I should become the possessor of some choice fancy fowls. The specimens found at Dove's Nest upon our arrival were so mixed as regards breed that you could not tell where the Cochin began and the Leghorn ended, or whether their strain began and ended at all. Having no style or pedigree about them, they were not so satisfactory to look as to feast upon.

We therefore lost no time in putting them where we fancied they would render the greatest good. We had them à la marenge, à la créole, and, to show our patriotism, in the good old Southern style, which we emphasized with Gallic prestige when we called it à la bama.

We generally called one of these chicken dinners a love-feast, inasmuch as the chickens that constituted the feast were analogous to love, as they were pretty much all wings.

Softly they faded from the shining landscape like the buttons from a suit of ready-made clothing, until there were but a few left, which I intended to preserve for maternal ancestors.

"Fine feathers make fine beds," I remarked, philosophically, as I no-



ticed Phillada endeavoring to elucidate the ornithological mystery of a fricassee that was chiefly remarkable for its wild prodigality of necks; "and I am going to consult the advertising columns of the Plough and Harrow in the hope of finding the address of some dealer in fancy eggs."

Having found that a reliable man up in Aroostook County, Maine, sent eggs all over the country for five dollars per setting, I lost no time in



sending for three settings—one each of Leghorns, Brahmas, and Cochins—and looked pleasantly forward to the time when I should surprise the natives with my choice strains.

Long before the eggs arrived at Dove's Nest I began making preparations for a great poultry campaign. I not only counted my chickens before they were hatched, but before I ever saw the eggs. I had a new run made, divided into three parts, that the fowls of different strains might not become hopelessly mixed.

"It seems a great deal of money to pay for a setting of eggs," said Phillada; "but after a while I suppose we can supplement our income by disposing of ours."

"We may," I replied; "but just at present I am looking forward more to spring broilers and Spanish omelets than anything else, although it



seems but reasonable to believe that the latter might be enjoyed in its highest perfection when constructed, so to speak, of the fragile fruit of the black Spanish species."

Patent metallic nests were also purchased, and the roof of the hen-house made so tight that a duck would fly from it as from the shadow of the bosom of the maternal hen to get into the thickest of a thunder-shower.

When everything was about complete the longed-for eggs reached Dove's Nest, each one wrapped in cotton like a jewel. As we wished to lose no time, and as the hens were in an enthusiastic hatchful mood, we commenced operations at once.





It was beautiful to study the serene, heavenly resignation of those ancient birds. Their expressions of countenance were as soft and dreamy as a creamy wood-dove's breast. Perhaps, in reality, these expressions were not as chastely poetic as my imagination painted them, but to me they seemed at least to say, "You have seen fit to place us upon five-dollar settings, and we keenly appreciate the beautiful confidence reposed in us."

I am not certain at this day that I ever

saw them lessen their enthusiasm or leave those eggs for the common recreations of henhood. They would calmly sit there half asleep, as though employed by the day. And in order to show them how I appreciated their efforts, I would stand by and feed them from my hand, and then gently stroke their feathers with the grain, until their backs were resplendent in the manner peculiar to the shoulders of an eight-dollar Prince Albert coat.

We had a memorandum on the wall setting forth the date of the hatching of the chicks, and it is almost needless to say that it was often thought of and discussed at great length, while we figured on the number that would ripen and be rounded into perfect chickenhood, and the probable number that would not survive the initial moon.



On the day that they were to evacuate their shells we were all on hand to ascertain what fortune had done for us, because we realized then, as now, that chicken-hatching is indeed a lottery.

Not a chick put in an appearance, and we were quite as sorely disappointed as were the would-be mothers, who seemed to know by instinct the moment that the allotted period had expired.

And so it was for several days after; and my disappointment was about as poignant as was the hens', who looked upon me as though suspicious of the fact that I had put bad eggs under them for fun, while I looked upon the Aroostook dealer as one who had sold me three worthless settings as a matter of business, although I could not well see the business sagacity of such a transaction.

On the day which completed the fourth week of the setting of the hens, we went forth, as usual, as a matter of duty, and found that out of thirty-nine eggs one had been hatched out, and both Phillada and I could not refrain from laughing when we looked fondly and tenderly upon our one lone, solitary Pekin duck.



X

THE happiness and independence of the farmer depend largely upon the difference between the amount of his regular expenses and his precarious income. If his income were as sure as his expenses, he would be about as independent as he is popularly painted.

I noticed before I had been farming a great while that the men employed upon the place never allowed their wages to go five minutes past due, and by various impressions of their anatomies upon the clover I could picture to myself the blissfulness of their airy repose when their



brows should have been bound up with victorious sweat; and while contemplating these evidences of the imposition of my men, I would wonder how soon the check, long past due, would arrive to fill my cup with joy, and have a little flow-over in the saucer.

At this time I was expecting a check from a firm of city commission merchants, known as Messrs. Whittle & Cuttle—one of a class that carries on a quiet campaign that makes the farmer's life a burden, while it provides itself with the luxuries of the Orient.

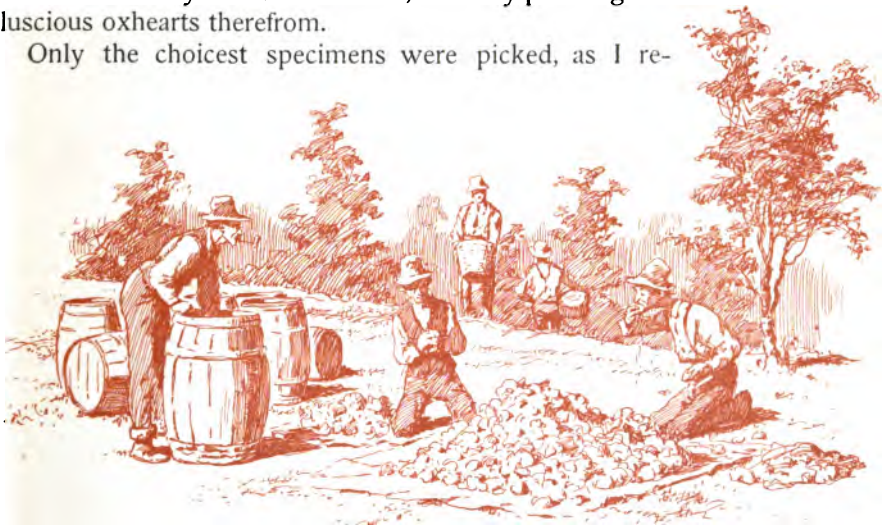
I was recommended to send my pears to one of these merchant pirates, and, not knowing them to be hostile to all interests save their own, followed the advice so freely given, and employed a number of people to do the picking and packing—competent people, who would pick only the finest specimens, and pack them carefully, that they might bring the highest market price.

To tell the truth, the matter of the gathering of these fruits was not totally devoid of pleasure. There was a sociability about it that was not entirely without a strange, peculiar

charm, and it was productive of much information that until that time was not a part and parcel of my knowledge of the mysteries of fruit raising.

I learned that when the professional picker is picking cherries by the quart he will include as many twigs as possible, that the measure may be quickly filled, and that when he picks for himself, and pays so much per quart for what he picks, he not only doesn't pick any twigs, but leaves the cherry stems on the tree, carefully plucking the luscious oxhearts therefrom.

Only the choicest specimens were picked, as I re-





marked before, and these were packed as carefully as though intended for shipment to China. They were carefully wrapped in paper separately and apart from their companions, and set in the barrel with the painful regularity of bricks. I still have a vivid recollection of the discomfort I experienced while hanging over the barrel edge by the stomach, and

working away with my head bobbing about inside. Of course I was willing to suffer a reasonable amount of distress when my fancy painted such golden results, such Golcondas of pristine coin, as would come from my shipment of pears at the rate of about six dollars per bushel.

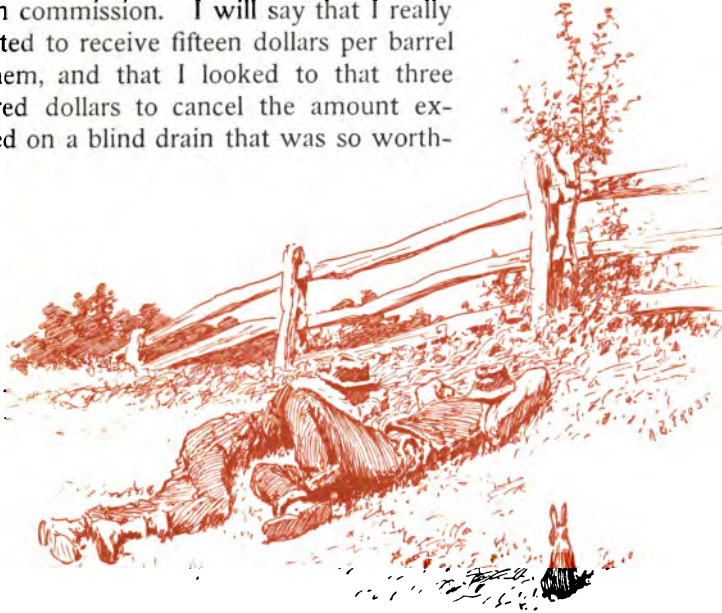
Having entered into a correspondence with the commission pirates, those unworthies lost no time in sending a package of their business tags, and were very anxious to negotiate the sale of my fruits, while their letter showed plainly how solicitous they were for my general health and welfare.

It was, indeed, a treat to know of the existence of such persons; and when my twenty barrels were carefully packed so that they were one solid pear, so to



speaking, and could be rolled around to any extent without breaking or "squashing," as Mr. Van Sickle termed it, I carted them to Cranberry Corners, and they were soon on their way from the howling wilderness to the howling metropolis.

I had made no bargain with Messrs. Whittle & Cuttle, the pirates of the main thoroughfare, as to price, as I understood they would get as much as possible on account of their working on commission. I will say that I really expected to receive fifteen dollars per barrel for them, and that I looked to that three hundred dollars to cancel the amount expended on a blind drain that was so worth-



less that when I paid for it I arose with the wrath of a potentate of the effete East, and wildly exclaimed, "Blind drain me no blind drains," or words to that effect.

After a week had elapsed I began to wonder if the pirates, Messrs. Whittle & Cuttle, had received the pears, neither realizing nor believing that they had already sold them for twenty-five dollars per barrel, and put the proceeds into bonds against a rainy day. Another week drifted by, and still another, and not a word of advice from the pirates, who appropriated the stamp enclosed for a reply.

I knew that the pears were sold, unless they had miscarried or spoiled on their hands. At any rate, they paid no attention whatever to my letters until long after the winter had passed, when, probably wishing to "do" me another season, they wrote me a brief letter saying the pears were not what they had expected, and enclosing their check for \$7.32, which was considerably less than I had paid for having the pears picked.

"I would let the fruit spoil on the trees," exclaimed Phillada, indignantly, "before I would send more to a commission merchant."

"Do you know why they are called commission merchants?" I asked. "Why?"

"Because," I replied, "they sell the farmers' products, keep the principal for themselves, and give the guileless agriculturist a trifling percentage. It is the farmer who works—his farm—on commission."



XI

MY potato crop proved a failure, which, unlike many a commercial failure, put nothing in my pocket except my hand, which went deep enough to gather the necessary coin for the purchase of a bushel or two from a neighbor, who modelled in clay many a hill and furrow, and was, figuratively speaking, the architect of his own misfortunes. He was obliged to accept fifty cents per bushel for them, owing to the fact



that it was what is technically known as a good potato year—for all but me—and because he had just paid forty dollars for a sulky rake that cost the manufacturer about six dollars and a half to put on the market.

“What difference does it make, anyhow?” asked Phillada, whose smile was the condensed milk of human kindness. “You know when the crop is bountiful, it yields little or nothing.”

“It is even so,” I replied. “The only time a high price is paid for



vegetables is when you have none to offer; or, to put it into the form of an Irish argument, the only time a crop is profitable is when it is a failure."

"That is the time it is profitable for the farmer," broke in Mr. Van Sickle. "But the city retailer charges as much for potatoes purchased at fifty cents per bushel as he does when they cost him a dollar. The great drawback of farming is that the farmer pays the highest price for everything he uses, and is obliged to take for his own produce whatever the dealer chooses to give him."



The most level-headed farmer Mr. Van Sickle ever knew was one who had a farm bordering on a salt-water bay. If his crops failed, it made little difference to him, because he could live on wild-ducks and fish. He never took fish to the market to sell, because he well knew that he would have to accept the first offer or have the fish spoil on his boat. He would allow the fish to swim about and enjoy themselves and keep up a marketable freshness,

and would not attempt to catch them until after he had concluded a cast-iron contract with some dealer. But as sharp as he was, he furnished a summer boarding-house with butter until it was his debtor to the extent of two hundred dollars. At the close of the season the proprietor melted softly away with the summer's silken butterfly, and the farmer had to seek fresh fields and pastures new to secure a like amount to pay for the fertilizer used on the potatoes that never developed into a crop. Having purchased my potatoes for fifty cents per bushel, it began to strike me that the best way to farm is to purchase one's produce, and permit some more ambitious person to do the farming. I began also to see, and very



plainly, that the proper way to farm is not to take the thing too seriously; to treat it as a joke, and anticipate nothing but failure. I determined to adopt this system as far as possible, and not to care if my curly cabbages curled themselves up into bunches of railroad cigars, to be gathered like so many bunches of bananas.

This feeling was only increased when the servant-girl left rather abruptly, on the ground that she could not stand the humdrum of the country. She longed for the giddy vortex of metropolitan life with the frenzied thirst of a society queen. She left early in the morning by the first train, and in her great hurry forgot to take any of our silver spoons along.



This servant-girl question in the country was even more vexatious than in the city. It used to cost something like five dollars to get one out to Dove's Nest and duly sworn in. She would stay about five days, demand her pay to date, at which time she would depart with an alacrity never displayed in the performance of her culinary functions.

It seemed very strange to me that a servant-girl should not like the country during the summer, but I was forced to conclude that it was owing to her lack of polite edu-

cation. Were she educated she would have resources, she would be able to read Tennyson, and thus pass the time pleasantly and profitably when not scrubbing; or she could walk about and enjoy the spiritual beauty of nature, and, enchanted by its subtle charms, go into tender rhapsodies of thought, and feel the mystic poetry though she could not make it burn and live on canvas. In such a mental condition she could experience enjoyment in every shrub and flower, and not be perpetually burning with that morbid yearning that only finds relief in a moonlight excursion or a circus pageant. But the



higher-education-of-women question remains unanswered until the servant-girl is sufficiently educated to realize that there may be serene happiness and content in a region where all is solitude and rest, even when the crop dries up and withers away, and nothing that you succeed in raising compares favorably with its description in the seed catalogue.

To tell the truth, we were obliged to do all the work that was done about the place. I had never labored so hard for a salary as I worked on the farm for nothing but the anguish and humiliation of defeat.

"And I am getting hands like an ancient mariner," I remarked, as I held those gnarled members up for inspection.

"And we are getting no money out of it into the bargain," said Phillada.

"Money is not everything," I remarked, by way of consolation.

"It may not be everything," she replied, philosophically, as she observed a neighbor step softly up behind the corn-crib, and, smiling, partake of our wood-pile—"it may not be everything, but it is just about ninety-nine per cent. of everything."



XII

HE is no doubt a happy man who farms for fun or money, or both, if he succeeds in realizing either. It is not recorded that Jacob was passionately fond of tilling the earth, but the manner in which he adhered to this branch of usefulness was extremely complimentary to the daughter of Laban, to say the least. I had made nothing so far—nothing but mistakes; and these mistakes were perhaps not so much due to my general ignorance as to the original devices I resorted to or contemplated.



Having heard that thunder will turn milk sour, I was really at a loss to know whether it turned it sour in the dairy pans or in the cow, and I hunted through all my books of reference to ascertain the truth, for I was afraid to go boldly forth and ask the question, lest I become the object of well-merited laughter and ridicule. It struck me that if the milk were soured by being exposed to thunder, the best thing to do would be to have it hermetically sealed as soon as given. If, on the other hand, it was

soured while yet within the beeve, my idea was to supply the place, if possible, with deaf cows, that would not, of course, be affected by the thunder, even if it should thunder from one end of the week to the other.

Most of the things that I hoped to raise were devoured by as fine a variety of insects as could be found anywhere. If the mosquitoes had only taken as kindly to the squashes as they did to me, I could have accepted the failure of that crop in

the guise of the gentlest of blessings. When the doors and windows

were closed, these pests would come down the chimneys in swarms, so that I frequently had to burn cast-off rubber boots and feathers on the hearths, even in the hottest weather. It was really a sad predicament to be placed in when I knew that if I stretched out on the porch in my steamer chair I would be driven in by these numerous insects, and that when I was once in, it would only be to meet another reception that would send me out again.

Therefore I only allowed the mosquitoes to bother me, because I couldn't help it. The other insects I left gloriously alone. Other farmers climbed into their fruit-trees, and lubricated the branches with all



sorts of washes. But I thought it would be better to leave the orchards in the hands of the ever-fair Pomona, and let her see that the apples were properly cut and dried for winter use. I at one time thought of making cider with the picturesque Dutch windmill, but this I abandoned when, upon examining the windmill, I ascertained the extremely stubborn fact



that it was a windmill that could only be used successfully in an æsthetic landscape-painting.

One day I discovered an artist painting it. I secretly wished that he might realize something handsome out of it, that I might know that it had not been erected in vain. He was a very voluble sort of man, and praised Dove's Nest at great length, going into raptures over the beauty of the contour of this thing and the atmospheric perspective of another. He had never seen such beautiful harmonies and contrasts before, and said that if I would allow him to paint the place, he would call it "The Old Homestead," and sell it in the next Academy for five thousand dollars. I gave him the permission so eloquently and fervently desired, hoping that the farm might be productive of something substantial to some one, and left him all alone in his glory.

I had an idea that his object in going into such a frenzied delight, such an ecstatic rhapsody over Dove's Nest, was to impress me in such a way

that I would make him an offer for his canvas, and not allow it to slip through my fingers, and become a possession of some haughty millionaire.

But I said nothing that would lead him to fancy my suspicion, and he painted away for several days with great enthusiasm. He would occasionally make a suggestion, such as putting a grand fountain of gold-fishes on the front lawn, and working in a plateau behind

the house, from which a picturesque cascade could flash and roar at the point covered by the westerly roof of the barn. I told him I thought these things might add zest and interest to the picture, and he put them

all in, and asked me if I would like the cascade to consist of green water, or if I would prefer it asparkling snowy foam.

I told him to rely on his own judgment, that I was little acquainted with the artistic qualities or principles of cascades. And then I left

him to finish it as best suited his artistic pleasure.

I could see in him the man who paints spotted cattle with a stencil



for each color, on the principle of printing oil-cloth, and I felt it a sentimental duty to avoid him, lest I be contaminated and lost.

"Let him paint my orchard, with the apples on the trees," I said to Phillada, "if he wishes to, and then he will paint something that will be at once a landscape and a still-life."

"But he has gone," replied Phillada.

"When did he go?" I asked.

"This morning," she replied, with a pleasant laugh. "You know, he asked me if I didn't think the owner of the place would like to buy the picture."

"Ah, he did, did he? And what did you say?"

"I told him we might buy it upon our return to the city, should we ever return, if he would first carry out his expressed intention, and get it hung in the Academy under the title of the 'Old Homestead;' that we might, should we decide to purchase, grace our wall with a canvas enjoying the prestige and glory that come through artistic recognition. He seemed to have a pressing engagement elsewhere just then, when he fled from my presence with the graceful alacrity of the antelope."



XIII

WHEN the year had reached that period at which the provident house or flat wife begins to realize that it is time to put up the winter things, as the preserves are usually called, I hailed an itinerant vender, and purchased several bushels of tomatoes and a few baskets of currants. Then we all set to work, and in the course of a couple of days were the happy possessors of about fifty two-quart jars of tomatoes, possibly the same number of goblets of jam, while all the claret and beer bottles stood in a row, like so many ill-assorted soldiers, filled to their very corks with catsup.

"When Jack comes out next Saturday we might tell him we got these things right on the farm," said Phil-lada.

"No," I replied; "for the simple reason that I would not pervert the truth in such a matter. It would be more seemly to say, methinks, that we got them right off the farm, and then he will, of course, think they are of our own raising. But which train will Jack come on?"

"I think on the four o'clock."

"I must remember that," I said, reflectively, "that I may have my brother send out the new corn, potatoes, and cauliflower from the city





on the noon train, and have it safely housed before our guest arrives. How mortifying it would be to have him, while sitting on the porch, observe the delicacies, which he is supposed to fancy were rounded into perfection under my hand and eye, delivered by a railroad express-man!"

Jack was one of our oldest and dearest friends, who was as glad to see us as we were to see him. He was not one of the class of city folks that will go into the rural districts to visit a friend only at those periods of the year when Nature is resplendent in her most alluring robes.

Consequently we were delighted to see him, and he and I were very happy chatting on the porch, while puffing from our pipes great opalescent garlands of the moth exterminator, which, dispensed by the Cranberry Corners grocer in fancy packages bearing the picture of a rampant Indian in full war-



paint, was, as a general thing, seriously regarded by the purchaser as tobacco.

Just as we were discussing the conditions of the crops, I saw a cloud of dust down the road, and asked Jack if he wouldn't like to look at our fine old Dutch windmill, that he might be out of the way while the expressman drove up to deliver the country produce purchased in Washington Market.

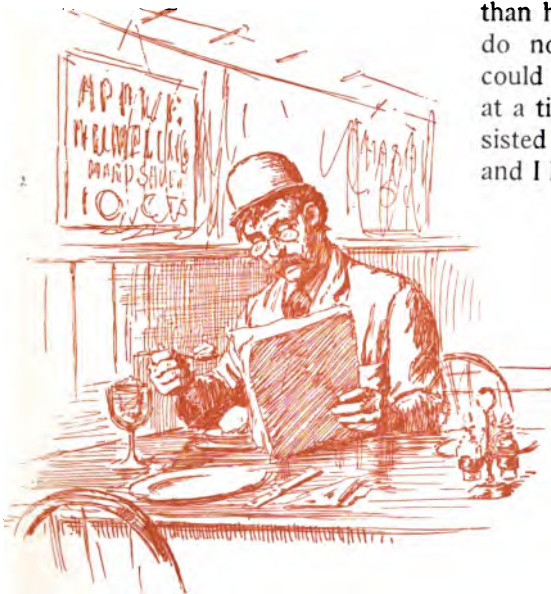
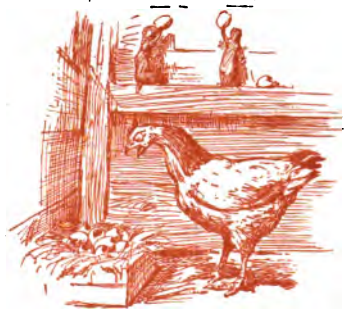
I have no distinct idea at this late day of the impression the windmill made upon my city friend, but I have a most vivid recollection of the sensation we experienced when we sat down to dinner, and Philip made some childish observation upon discovering beans on the table, when he had heard me say repeatedly that the beans had proved such a dismal failure that we would have to purchase some during the winter, or banquet upon solitary pork. At various other intervals Philip displayed his great precocity in a manner that left no doubt as to his brilliant future.

He was probably more communicative upon that occasion than he ever will be again, and I do not imagine that anything could have distracted him but pie at a time when our dessert consisted of muskmelon. Phillada and I laughed heartily at all these

remarks, to rob them of the appearance of truth, and to send our friend back with such a glowing description of Dove's Nest that no one would for an instant imagine that we were not in clover in every sense of the term.

When the dinner had been cleared away, and we were once more out on the porch, blowing

airy smoke wreaths of the moth exterminator through our noses, I burst into a pastoral rhapsody, which I rounded off with the declaration that I



should never think of leaving the country for the town, unless business or my health should make such a change imperative.

"Your health should certainly be good, out in this bracing atmosphere," he said, enthusiastically.

"Good!" I exclaimed; "I guess it is good! I never knew what health was before. Why, I can go to bed at 8 P.M. and sleep like a top until 7 A.M., and I have an appetite that I could never satisfy on a city in-



come. I have no drug or doctor bills now; and I often wonder how I ever managed to live when I kept a set of books and lunched on ten-cent boiled apple-dumplings."

"There is nothing like being satisfied," said Jack, philosophically. "If you like it out here, there is no reason why you should not groan when you look back upon your book-keeping experience. I think you have a lovely place."

"I guess I have," I replied, while I refilled my pipe—"I guess I have,

and I am satisfied, and more than satisfied, with the change. Of course I do have a disappointment occasionally, such, for instance, as a weasel crawling surreptitiously under the setting hen and drifting into a rosy vision after he has sucked all the eggs. But then I have my fresh golden lettuce sparkling with dew-drops for breakfast, and nice fresh cream, and butter as fragrant as a rose; why, I couldn't begin to tell you all the luxuries I have in an abundance that is startling."

"Do you have anything in the way of recreation?" he asked. "If you have that, your life must be an ideal one."

"There is pretty good perch-fishing down in the duck pond, and— Did you hear that?"

"Yes. What kind of a bird was it?" he asked.

"A quail," I replied; "and in a month I shall be out shooting them. Shooting is splendid sport, and a very healthful exercise. Besides, if you can only get the quail, it is easy enough to find the toast."

And as we chatted of this and that, we smoked the moth exterminator, and continued our conversation, while we walked over the farm. And when I bade him good-by on Monday morning, I felt happy in the reflection that his story of my prosperity and happiness would disturb the serene smile of my friends who chaffed me good-naturedly when I folded my pots and kettles and silently vanished from the city and its incessant hurly-burly.



XIV

IT frequently became necessary to drive to Cranberry Corners to lay in such farm produce for the table as we couldn't wait to send to New York for. These pilgrimages were fast becoming gala institutions, inasmuch as they broke the monotony of life at Dove's Nest. The vehicle unto which we annexed the unfiery tamed steeds was a marvel, considered from almost any standpoint. It was impossible to say exactly what had been the original name to designate the style of this specimen of rolling antiquity, owing to the fact that it had been repaired a great



many times in a manner not in accord with the prevailing spirit of the period to which it properly belonged. In fact, you could fancy an 1867 style of strap, an 1845 buckle, and an 1832 bolt or screw, until it became so absurd, considered as a consistent work of

antiquity, that you could think of no fitting parallel unless a painting of Osceola in a kilt, or a statue of Oliver Cromwell in a white high hat begirt by a deep mourning band. This relic of the period of peruke and minuet can be best described by the word "rickety." Yet could it go over the roughest road not only without going to pieces, but without apparent injury. If it didn't belong to the original owner of the farm, and if it didn't pass on from possessor to possessor to date, where in the

world did it come from? The harness was not as old as the vehicle, but it seemed to have reached the maximum limit of the usefulness of a set of harness. It was always necessary to fasten certain parts of it together with twine, and to force new holes through it by the simple process of driving a nail. It was also a common thing to take some rope along upon any considerable journey, as it could never be told at what moment it might be needed. The horses, though serene and venerable, had in all probability never known another set of harness. When wanted for one of these excursions, the noble equines were generally out of sight at some remote corner of the farm. They were seldom near the house, except when contentedly munching the currant bushes or the choicest fruit-trees.



At every house along the way some one would come forth with a letter to be delivered at the post-office, or with a request to bring, upon our return, a bar of opalescent soap or a yeast cake. At some houses a pole fastened to the fence ex-

tended almost to the edge of the roadway like a fishing-rod. On the end of this rod a cigar box was securely fastened, and into this cigar box the proprietor would drop his letters or papers, to be gathered by the first one moving in the direction of Cranberry Cor-



ners. One of these houses was occupied by an eccentric individual who evidently thought he had hit upon a device to circumvent the Ethiop,



whose honesty becomes impaired and fractured through the combined influences of a moonlight night and a melon-patch. His plan was illustrated practically by the melon vines growing up the side of his house after the fashion of wistaria. He had pumpkins and squashes growing in the

same way, and told me it was next to impossible for a thief to gather them with a pole, because the melons would bob against the house and give the alarm.

Although this man had made useful departures when he conceived the idea of the way-side letter box and formulated a plan for raising melons



for his own table, I was unable to understand another scheme of his which struck me as being decidedly amusing to the eye.

On an old spreading whitewashed apple-tree—a dried apple-tree because deceased—he had a swinging flower garden. From almost every branch hung some cast-off receptacle neatly whitewashed, such as a coal-scuttle, a baby's bath-tub, a watering-pot, a tea-kettle, etc. Each one of these utensils was filled with earth, and had flowers flowing over the top in great profusion. When the wind caused the coal-scuttle and the baby's bath-tub to dash madly together, the effect was startling. They bobbed around in great style, and from my horses' blank astonishment I could fancy that they had such a keen sense of humor that they regarded it as an experiment in wind-flower culture.

The road was so sandy that it used to strike me as one that could be most successfully traversed on foot when the pedestrian wore snowshoes. On the journey, which was a tedious one, I frequently gleaned much information on the subject of farming from people at work along the way. They would come down, lean on the fence, and tell me about their Savoy cabbages and sugar-coated beets, and ask me many questions concerning my place.



From all these snatches of conversation I gathered the fact that the only way to make money out of farming was to take boarders; then a handsome profit could be realized upon things that were otherwise without anything like a ready-made market.

As I have already said, these little drives were not without their charm, as they afforded a change of scene, and gave me an opportunity to rest my weary limbs, which were already becoming gnarled and full of inequalities through standing daily upon a stony hill madly coquetting with dear old mother-in-law earth.

As I neared the station at Cranberry Corners, I could realize that I was regarded by the callow youth of that one-horse, or rather one-store, place as one savoring very strongly of the rural districts. Their sidelong glances at the ancient vehicle, drawn by the ancient horses in the ancient harness, satisfied me of the honest and inexpensive amusement I was

affording them. The keeper of the solitary store alluded to above was always more than delighted to see me, because he well knew that my skill was such that it would be impossible for me to negotiate a sugar purchase on the basis of a turnip payment. In other words, he knew that I was a cash customer—the only one he had—and therefore one to be received and treated with great respect and consideration.

He was the same old man that drove me to Dove's Nest upon the occasion of my first or prospecting visit. He always laughed when he claimed the credit of having located me, and said he felt himself the author of my great success. It seemed to me that he suspected the real state of affairs, and was laughing in the mellifluous manner of the polite, refined chaffer. I always gave him the credit of locating and settling me, and thanked him cordially for having done so, after I had complimented him upon his great foresight and general sagacity, that he might be sorely disappointed if his real intention were to make fun of me. And then I felt quite at my mental ease while I read his placards of caution, which admonished the public to "Eat Smith's Oats," "Wash with Jones's Soap," "Drink Robinson's Cocoa," etc.

There would I stand and watch the guileless grocer tie up the packages and bite the twine until my order was filled. On the way home I felt rejuvenated, and when I drove up to the door of Dove's Nest all hands rushed out to see if I had any letters, while even the poultry that had escaped the prying fingers of the Ethiop to date regarded me with curiosity, as though they would learn the latest news from the hustling, bustling city.



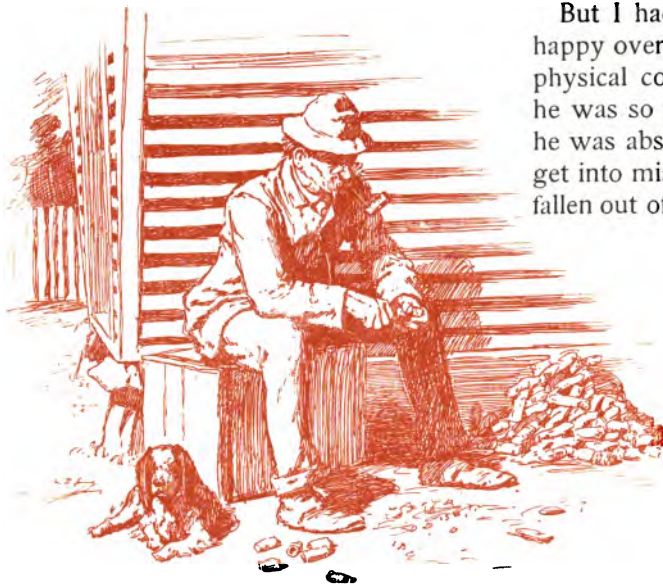
XV

I HAVE frequently heard that stony land is not the most desirable kind for the realization of good crops, but that it is probably the finest to be had for the purposes of sheep-culture. Dove's Nest was evidently not designed by nature for either; it was too stony for agriculture, and not sufficiently stony for sheep. But I did not fail to take my medicine philosophically. I laughed at the fate that defeated the ends of my labor



in the sunny field, and cursed my land with a poverty of stone that made the raising of mutton an established impossibility.

I didn't trouble myself about the pig-killing time; if I could only succeed in killing time pleasantly myself, I would not bother myself about the porkers. It will be remembered they disappeared, never to return, during the early part of the season, and I was probably money in pocket by the catastrophe, as it would have been necessary to purchase corn for them to eat and fatten upon during their last act in the drama of life. But if the corn did not develop into a generous crop, I could rest assured of one thing: I still had a goodly supply of cobs which I could construct into pleasant pipes, while those modelled from the cobs of my Indian corn might be poetically characterized as calumets.



But I had one thing to be happy over, and that was the physical condition of Philip; he was so fat and ruddy that he was absolutely too lazy to get into mischief. He hadn't fallen out of a window or into a pond once, and was always so shining and clean that I sometimes feared there was something wrong in his make-up, and that he would never distinguish himself.

As I said before, he was provided with milk

from one cow; and to make sure that it could not get mixed with that of another, I kept but a single specimen. She had a great habit of eating wild onions, which so flavored the milk that no one but Philip would touch it. He finally drank it with such delight and relish that we soon began to foresee in him a hopeless slave of the onion habit, whose lot in later life could only be a happy one through marriage to a native of Bermuda.

The other farmers, whose crops had also failed, were now thinking of making the necessary preparations for the campaign of the next season, when their efforts would probably be attended

by a similar fate. They were also looking forward to that blissful period of rest when the snow is drifted above the window-sills, and you have to push the door open against a great fleecy bank, squeeze through the



narrow angle, and sacrifice your breast buttons on the edge of the portal to get into the air to shovel a path to the woodpile, to gather the hickory to kindle the fire for the matutinal feast.

"What do you do in winter, anyhow?" I asked one of these earth-beaters whom I met one day.

"Oh, we don't do nothin' at all," he replied. "We just sit around and play checkers and eat popcorn. I've got a nice new-fangled corn-popper I'd like to show you the next time you're over my way."

I promised to call and examine the popper upon the occasion of my next journey in his direction.

The next thing was to set to work and get in the winter firewood—I, in my ignorance, not knowing that it should have been laid in long before, to have had time to dry during the summer. I went to work chopping with great glee, feeling secure in the belief that as the trees were



already full grown and ripe for the axe, my wood crop could not very well be a failure.

After the wood was arranged in ashen rows, from which it could be lifted without trouble, I began to think of laying in a generous supply of cider and apple-jack, for the reason that my long winter nights must be passed pleasantly in the glow of the blazing, sputtering logs. I did this, not because I was an enthusiastic patron of the flowing bowl, but because I could not eat pop-corn or play checkers, and I must have some substitute, be it never so unworthy.

By the way in which the old Dutch windmill was whirling around, I came to the conclusion that I was located in a pretty windy spot, and that it was about time to examine the house to ascertain its approximation to a colander.

After closing the shutters, I found that I could still read a newspaper in some of the rooms; and one night one of these darkened rooms was so light, through the medium of Artemis, that I concluded a lamp or candle would be a ridiculous excess. I could fancy the wild, weird Æolian melodies on a sharp January night while the



elements whistled through these crannies and crevices. I could also fancy the stray bird flitting through the casual aperture, and perching on the stove-pipe to keep warm. So I had the structure calked and weather-stripped as well as I could. Then I adjusted blankets to the frames upon which the mosquito canopies rested during the summer, and did everything else I could think of to keep the place warm and air-tight.

I even went so far in the way of precaution as to have a snow-shovel in each room, so that if one should have the misfortune to awake beneath one of nature's fleecy counterpanes a couple of feet thick, he could shove himself out.

"I think this is ridiculous," said Phillada. "You would make farming worse than it is."

"I couldn't if I tried," I replied; "and I know my humble limitations too well to make an effort beyond my strength to perform successfully."

"But why not use hot bricks, if the place is going to be so cold?"

"Hot bricks would cool off in a minute in these rooms," I said. "But I'll tell you what we might do."

"What?" she asked.

"Why, we might get a couple of Esquimau dogs to lie across our feet at night. They would thrive and fatten on the cold air, and keep us as warm as toast is said to be."

"A delightful idea!" she said; "because they are so warm-blooded. And on the same line of reasoning we might have a pet alligator to lie across our feet during the summer and give us the benefit of his cold blood."

So, laughing at such a delicious Hibernian analogy, I promised to think of the advisability of purchasing an Esquimau dog and a pet alligator, whose existence I would make happy even if I had to refresh him at dawn and dusk with a shower-bath of Florida water.

XVI

JUST at the time when autumn with busy brush painted wood and meadow in an opulence of cardinal and gold, and the partridge whirled from coverts of beech and cedar, and all the land was wrapped in draperies of drifting haze, the air became full of the glory of the approaching annual county fair. I went to this grand aggregation of vegetable and other triumphs, partly as a matter of duty and partly to enjoy the victorious happiness of others, even if I could not boast of any myself.

I am willing to admit that when I saw the wonderful specimens on



exhibition, and thought of my impotent efforts for success in the useful field of agriculture, envy painted me a deep rich green. There were pumpkins lying about in profusion that would have proved amply spacious for Cinderella's coach and four, and suggested Golcondas of spicy, toothsome pie. There were egg-plants quite as large as small water-melons, and great pot-bellied squashes, each of which bore a striking resemblance to a carafe.

"It is more than passing strange," I ventured to remark, "that these farmers about me should achieve such success, and I none whatever."

"I think I know why they have been so fortunate," said Phillada.

"And why, pray?" I asked.

"Because they must have had the foresight to purchase their seeds from the dealers who print highly colored plates showing the mammoth specimens that result from using their specialties. We have thus learned one golden business truth, namely, that there are seedsmen who do not



falsify their salsify or anything else in each and every gorgeous chromatic still-life displayed in their annual catalogues."

Can it be possible, I reflected, that, after all, these seed-catalogue pictures are really from life, and not from the imagination of the artist, who would assist his patron in gathering the confidence and money of the unwary?

Alas! many a solid living truth continues to live on only to be smiled at as a fallacy; and the fact having been proved that the agricultural specimen in the picture may be realized and enjoyed by the simple process of planting the seed whose results it sets forth so generously, we may shortly expect to see the shaky, uncertain-spotted circus horse gallop around the ring with distended nostrils in the mad, majestic, Pegasus-like action shown in the gayly illuminated poster.

Under a large canvas I think I found the finest exhibit of farm products



I had ever seen up to that period. And what a fine variety of ripe, rich color! The orange of squashes, the purple of egg-plants, the green of cabbages, the red of winter apples, to say nothing of the dull, rich tones of various grapes and plums, lit the scene with a ruddy glow, and filled it with a mellow, pleasant scent.

Having nothing to show for my summer's work that would have a serious chance of recognition for honors in a prize contest, I assured several farmers who importuned me on the subject that I had been so busy that I really hadn't had time to consider the advisability of allowing myself to be represented by a peach-blow po-



tato or a Berkshire pig. I had come simply as a looker-on—as one unskilled in the subtler mysteries of an art which he would learn sitting at the feet of a master, and basking in the lamp of his superior knowledge.

My pigs that wandered away, never to return—in the pork—came back on the pleasant wings of memory when I viewed the colossal specimen that had been brought to the fair to win a prize of from two to



five dollars for the owner. There was one pig in particular that was so rotund that his epidermis glistened through his bristles like a bald-head through the few remaining hairs when nature gathers them one by one, and coldly refuses the gentle benison of an aftermath. This porker was as fat as a pin-cushion, and, like a pin-cushion, was without a fold. When he opened his mouth and smiled, his eyes closed, and a ripple ran over his anatomy as over water, and ended in a scarcely perceptible agitation of his tail.

I thought, as I looked at the sole occupant of the sty, how much more in accord with the processes of a philosophic mind is it to purchase one's

pork ready made, and to allow a more ambitious and enterprising brother to develop it, and realize the monetary profit!



The race-horses, as they were called, trotted in from three to three minutes and a half, and, of course, appealed more strongly to the humorist than to the sportsman. It was really painful to watch these unfortunate animals forced

around the track, because they were so slow that their suffering seemed exceedingly monotonous and wearisome.

But the racing of the horses was not more painful than the spectacle of

several hundred farmers applauding enthusiastically and shouting themselves sore over the silver-plated eloquence of a one-legged soldier orator, who pointed out the political way in which they should go, and exhorted them to vote according to a doctrine entirely counter to their interests.

That night I sat before the blazing logs at Dove's Nest—for already there was a chill in the air—and, while smoking my corn-cob pipe, drifted off into a chaste agricultural vision, in which I knew myself as the possessor of pigs as large as Shetland ponies, that wandered about munching pumpkins of the dimensions of barrels; I had a man who worked the place on shares conscientiously, and presented me with a handsome profit at the close of the season, after supplying my table generously throughout the summer; and when at last I awoke to find the logs smouldering in the ashes, and my pipe out, and compared the dream with the reality, I can only feebly express my feelings when I say that it was like a swift transition from an Arabian Night to an Arabian nightmare.



XVII

ALTHOUGH the corn had been a failure, I could console myself, or at least justify myself in an attempt at self-consolation, when I reflected on the fact that I had a beautiful stock of corn-stalks. This, of course, meant that if my flock of choice chickens, that consisted of the lone, solitary Pekin duck mentioned in an earlier chapter, must go without corn, the cow would at least have a goodly supply of corn-stalks, a fine combination of bedding and provender, which, considered as the latter, would be a great improvement on the emerald diet of the twinkling mead, in that, even should it not prove as



palatable to the piebald beeve, it would subsequently be developed into a milk and butter as sweet as the ambrosial breath of spring itself, and entirely emancipated from the galling fetters of the fiery, untamed onion.

When I mention the Pekin duck, perhaps I should add that it was regarded simply as a pet; Phillada, in her great anxiety for its welfare and safety, not allowing it to go near the pond, but providing for its use a tub of





scene, from whence we knew not, and sought and found refuge beneath the heaving bosom of the hen, who seemed more than maternally happy in her new possession. The duckling and the chick grew fonder of each other daily, and were inseparable companions by the time the mother had successfully performed the highest of her various earthly missions—that of rendering us all postprandially happy, and causing us to hang her brittle wish-bone over the library door with all the superstitious reverence bestowed upon a new-found horseshoe.

In the morning they would wander away together, the happiest of playmates, and roam all about the place. When the chick's instinct told it that it was essential to flatten out in a dust-hole, the duckling would stand by and wait patiently for its companion to enjoy its dust bath to the utmost; and when the duckling wanted a natatorial dip in the tub set apart for its use, the chick would perch calmly upon the edge of the same, enjoying the pleasure of the swimmer, until the latter found it necessary to quack for me to put it under the stove.



water near the back door. In this tub the duck would swim about until so exhausted that it would be obliged to quack its loudest to have some one place it upon the ground. I have frequently lifted it out of the water by the neck, and deposited it on the kitchen floor that it might waddle under the stove to dry.

Shortly after this duck saw the light a stray chick came on the



Every day, when the twilight shadows began to lengthen, the weary chick would fly up in the branches of a small tree to perch for the night. Then the poor lone duckling would seek the repose that an old flour barrel grants, and set up a wailing and lamentation that would melt the heart of the chick, and cause it to descend and enter

the barrel, where the two would sit, and, leaning against each other for warmth, drift away softly and sweetly on the purple pinions of rosy rest.

One day, when the time for retiring had come, the chick was nowhere to be found. Long and patiently the duckling watched and waited, and finally lifted up its quack and poured forth its feelings in a most pathetic wail. In the morning it refused to be comforted in the same spirit that it refused food.

All that day it did not leave the barrel, but stood within the same on one foot, with drooping head, and an expression altogether too sad to be faithfully delineated in words.



That afternoon I found the chick out in the barn, under a box that had fallen over it. It seemed buried in deep grief, which appeared based upon the worry it knew the duckling was experiencing on its account. For while I held it, even though I stroked its feathers kindly, it evinced a great anxiety to be

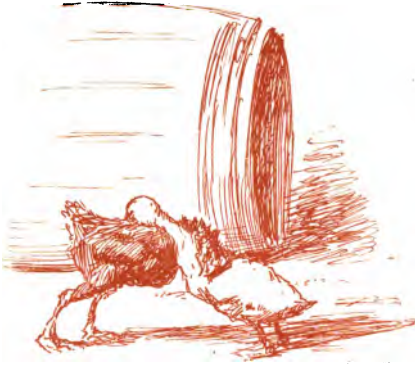
free; and when at last I put it on the ground, it ran and flew (for it worked both its feet and wings at the same time), in its great hurry to reach its companion. And when they came together their happiness was unbounded. After the first outburst they went forth and wandered about the place to have a little exercise, and limber up their first and second joints after their periods of sorrowful confinement.

And when they finally returned to their barrel they stood and gazed upon each other with a sort of



imbecilic gratitude. And so they stood gazing at each other until their heads fell forward in a tender embrace; and so they fell asleep.

Shortly after this, Mr. Van Sickle happened to drop in to make one of his social calls, that occupied any time from twenty minutes to three hours, according to the amount of work he had on hand.



I told him of the pathetic pastoral of the duckling and the chick, and that started him on the subject of the peculiarities of poultry.

"Why," said he, "I have a way of my own for killing a chicken when I want one for the table. I mean I have a way of getting it without a chase."

"What is your method?" I inquired, anxious to add bit by bit to my limited knowledge of farming.

"Why, just this way," he went on: "I take a panful of corn in my left hand, and scatter it close to my feet with my right, in which I hold a walking-stick. After calling the chickens, and while they are about my feet devouring the food, I haul off and crack a rooster on the head, and while he is stunned, chop his head off."

"It is a very good way," I said, "and should I ever have chickens again, I intend to employ it."

"The only trouble about it is that it doesn't always work."

"How is that?" I asked.



“On account of the chickens’ intelligence,” he said. “You see I always kill the roosters, and never the pullets. After I had operated in this way several times, they seemed to see through the game, and now when I try it all the pullets run up and eat the corn, while the roosters stand off on the knoll, and look at me as though trying to laugh, and for the life of me I cannot coax them within three times the range of my walking-stick.”



XVIII

AT last the many-hued autumn passed away on glittering golden sandals, and the only proof that the trees had ever known summer was visible in the few stray brown curled leaflets that still clung and trembled on the scrub-oaks. And then old winter came on apace with such fury that even our winter apples could not resist its power to freeze



them, until they were as hard and frigid as so many snowballs. By keeping a rousing fire all the time, and drinking plenty of hot water for my dyspepsia, I managed to keep reasonably warm, although I often thought of the poor Esquimau, and how he keeps up a happy glow on a

diet of oil, while I looked fondly at the kerosene lamp, as though I would empty it at a draught, in imitation of the hardy seal-hunter.

"If cold weather and snow combined make a good fertilizer," I remarked, "next year ought to be a great one for crops."

"Do you expect to farm another year?" asked Phillada. "Perhaps the owner of Dove's Nest will want it."

"He can have it, whether he wants it or not," I responded, glad of the opportunity to declare myself.

"Indeed I think we have tested farming," she went on, without even indulging in a smile at my expense.

"Indeed we have," I said, from the bottom of my heart, when I



thought of the trials, expense, and results of the wild experiment. "But there is one thing I must do first of all."

"And what may that be?" asked Phillada.

"I must have a doctor order me back. If we go from preference, we shall be laughed at; but if our return be but a question of health, the sympathy of our friends will be lavished upon us."



That very day I trudged over to Cranberry Corners—for it was too cold to drive—and made a call on the doctor.

"I see," he said, after he had asked me a few questions; "a hard outdoor occupation, and no rest of body or spirit. The thing you need is not medicine, but an in-door life—a sedentary occupation. Now, if you

could only get to the city, where you could, for instance, keep a set of books, you would be a new man in a month."

"Once upon a time I was a bookkeeper," I replied, with a laugh.

"Go and be one again," he said, "and you will be all right."

I never paid more cheerfully

for anything in my life than I did for that advice, and I walked home so briskly that the observer would have been more apt to suspect that I was running from home for a doctor than that I was running home from a doctor. In fact, no one would have for a moment suspected that there was anything the matter with my general health.

"What did the doctor say was the matter?" asked Phillada.

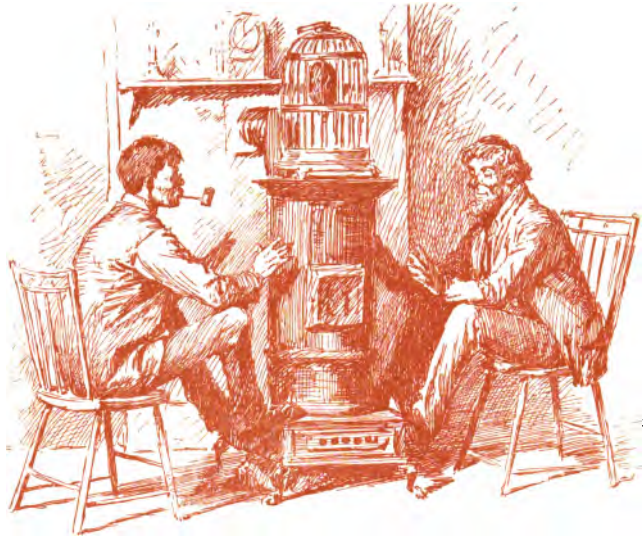
"Nothing," I replied; "but I've got to go to the city for it."

We never before experienced such happiness in Dove's Nest as this prospect of getting out of it. We were filled with gentle visions of picture exhibitions, and matinées, and pleasant luncheons at the restaurant, and the thousand and one other things that serve to make life worth living in the city.

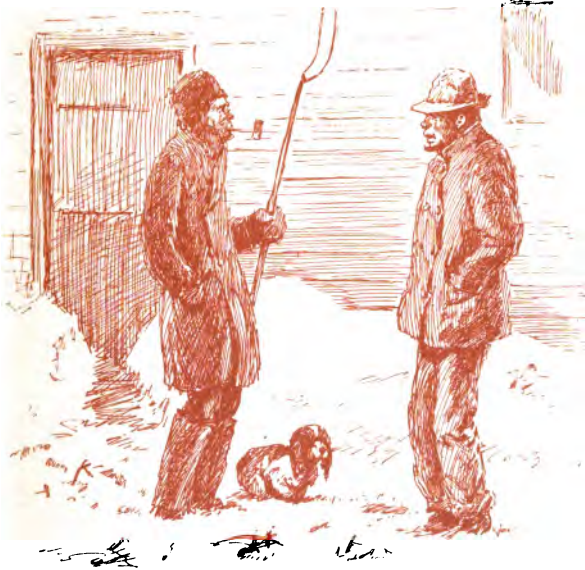
In the course of a few days I managed to effect a compromise with the owner of the place, who, it seems, in his efforts to dispense Dutch windmills on a large scale, was about as successful as I had been in distinguishing myself as a farmer, inasmuch as the great majority of the descendants of the old Dutch settlers—who would naturally acknowledge a predilection for the quaint windmills of Holland—lived in New York, where the windmill toils not, neither does it spin.



As the real proprietor would be on hand to take possession in the course of two weeks, I made up my mind to take things easy for that period of time. In looking over the columns of our daily paper, that was often several days of age when it reached us, I learned that our old flat was in the market; and by correspondence I succeeded in securing it at the old figure, which was very satisfactory to me, and saved me the trouble and annoyance of going to town on a flat hunt.



About this time a recently landed Irishman came to me and solicited the privilege of working for his board. Indeed, the weather was too cold



to warrant even a naturally hard-hearted man in closing his ears to and his door against such a pathetic appeal as a prayer for labor without pecuniary reward. So I smiled upon his humble petition, knowing that if I could only prevent his presence at the kitchen stove he would be obliged to work to keep warm, and that would give me a chance to part my coat-tails at the

open fireplace, and enjoy a slight portion of the long-needed rest that the doctor suggested on the occasion of my recent visit.

Although a fairly attentive workman, I think he was chiefly to be enjoyed through his attempts at sociability, which were never lacking. Whenever he entered a warm room he would prefer some complaint, such as the fact, discovered by him, that a certain leak in the barn was



letting the rain into the bran bin; or offer a suggestion, such as blanketing the cow as well as the horses; and then drift off into a series of reminiscences after the fashion of Mr. Van Sickle. This at first led me to believe that he was a worthy man; but before many days I learned that it was simply a trick of his to gain a cessation of motion, and to stand in glowing comfort before the stove.

"I don't think you should blame the poor man," said Phillada one day, after I had been expressing myself on his manner of working, or rather avoiding work; "he must get an occasional chill out there."

"Perhaps he does," I replied; "he certainly stands still long enough to. But that should not excite your sympathy; for when he gets a chill by simply standing still, he should realize a burning fever by working like a beaver."

XIX

I HAD but a week longer to linger in the Dove's Nest. At the expiration of that time I would have to take wings unto myself and fly back to the flat, which, in contradistinction to Dove's Nest, we called, but not sarcastically, a set of pigeon-holes.

Even as enthusiastically as we had looked forward to the country, we now looked forward to the city; and when we were not looking forward to it we were looking backward at it and longing for the time when we should renew its acquaintance. From the picture of the cows wading in crystal brooks I looked to that of the condensed-milk man driving up to the door and delivering unto us any quantity desired, while the dealer had the condensed cows to look after in health and to care for in sickness.

When I reflected on the tramp to Cranberry Corners to catch the train, which, if I missed, I could not catch until the morrow, it seemed a real luxury to be half a paved, lighted block from the "L" road with such an excellent service.

It seemed actually strange to me that my views could change so; that I could see so much good where I once could see only evil; that I could note so many drawbacks in a region which I at one time had regarded only as an earthly paradise. Every trick known in the city I could match with one in every respect bucolic. In the city, the janitor becomes enamoured of and purloins your coal; in the country, a man will come without so much as a letter of introduction and help himself to your cord-wood and poultry.





While thinking of many other arguments to justify my new move, and while wondering how a man with the refined songful soul of H. Q. Flaccus could have contented himself on a farm, even on the classic Tiber, Phillada announced that she had commenced the packing, and commanded me

to stop dreaming my dreams about burying cabbages and unearthing turnips for the winter, and come to her assistance. This fiat I respected with alacrity, not because packing for a move is one of my several weaknesses, but because I did not want a repetition of her last unaided effort in the same direction. I will not make more than a passing comment on the same, trusting that that may account for my ready response to the summons to lend a hand. And that passing comment is to the effect



that she packed too omnivorously, if I may so put it, to agree with my ideas of what consistent packing should be. I do not pretend to boast a knowledge of the deeper mysteries of this art, nor to possess even a superficial notion of its requirements, yet I feel that I was not unreasonable upon the occasion of our arrival at Dove's Nest when I spoke disparagingly of the bumptious order of the fair packer, who had indiscriminately mixed tin-ware, crockery, clothing, and food, when I discovered that a salt codfish was encompassed by my dress-coat, and that my silk hat was rudely forced out of shape by having had a ham forced into it.



That night, when we sat before the blazing logs, we felt happy, in every sense of the word. We had tried an experiment without realizing a long-cherished dream. But we felt that our experience would tend to make us better satisfied with our less roomy quarters in the city. We had a long list of things we intended doing on our return, especially in the way of amusements calculated, figuratively speaking, to remove the hay-seed from our hair and introduce us once more to the refinements of civilization.

We stood looking out of the back window across the snow-clad fields.



As the only light in the room was that of the sputtering logs, we could see far into the whitened distance. There was a dreary sweetness about it that gave me a pang of regret at leaving, despite the fact that I had never known real suffering before occupying Dove's Nest.

I think Phillada felt the same, for she uttered not a word until she broke the silence with, "Who's that coming over the hill so fast?"

I looked, and saw a man running at full speed in the direction of the house. It was rather a misty night, for it was snowing, and everything was dead white, which made the man's figure very distinct at quite a distance, while a white house a short distance down the road could not be seen at all.

Nearer and nearer he came, until I could identify him as our new wage or rather board worker by his great mass of red whiskers.

He never paused in his flight until he reached the room where

we were looking out on the dreary fields.

I will not attempt to give his words, but will simply say that he was in a state of fright bordering on madness. Just over the hill he said he saw



the hinder legs of a black cow chasing the fore-legs and head of another black cow; that no matter how fast or how slow the fore-legs travelled, the hinder members would always remain at the same distance. When the head would toss itself in the air, as though maddened by despair at not being able to escape, the tail would whip the air in precisely the same frenzied spirit. And as frantic as the head became because it could not throw the hinder legs off the trail, just as frantic would the tail become because of the inability of the hinder members to capture the head. When he left he said they were standing perfectly still, neither being able to gain on the other.

“Was that story all to gain a rest by the fire, when you should be carrying in wood?” I asked.

He not only denied that this was his motive, but insisted on my going with him to see that he was not fabricating. On my return I had to laugh until I was helpless.

“What was it?” asked Phillada.

“Van Sickle’s Holstein-Friesian cow,” I replied. “The surroundings were so white and snowy that he could distinctly see her black head, legs, and tail, but could not discern the broad white band about her body at all.”



XX

IT was a source of great relief to us when we once more saw the weary, defeated champion of windmills duly established in Dove's Nest. His great anxiety to be restored to his original occupation made it easy for us to arrive at a thoroughly satisfactory business arrangement;



and when we parted we were full of prayers and hopes for each other's happiness and good fortune.

Once more I had the pleasure of seeing Phillada in the attitude of a flat-wife, and Spot exercising as of old on the window-sill, and capering up and down our rooms, arranged, of course, in tandem, or Indian-file style.

When I had to remain down-town all night to find the seven cents necessary to balance the books, I thought of the old days when it was

obligatory to sit up night after night to watch the tree whose branches bent beneath their great burden of chickens.

When my friends came around and asked me how I liked farming, I waxed enthusiastic, and told them that it was the only genuine pursuit extant. In fact, I spoke of it more warmly than I did when I first thought of embracing it as an occupation combining pleasure with business.

"Then why did you give it up?" they would ask.

"For the same reason that I abandoned bookkeeping,"

I would reply, smiling; "I was ordered to do both by the doctors. One doctor advised me to drop the pen and take up the hoe; another told me to hang up the hoe and seek refuge in the pen, and in each case I was an

obedient patient."

I also made it a rule to disparage bookkeeping in a mild way, that I might seem sore over an occupation that really was the cause of my contented state of mind, and at the same time create the impression that I was the victim of keen disappointment in



not being able to continue in the balmy path of agriculture. I still had the Plough and Harrow on my table, having considered it sufficiently valuable to ask the publishers to change my address, that I might enjoy what I honestly believed, from my knowledge of the subject treated, to be, taken as a whole, about the finest and liveliest specimen of all the humorous publications in existence.

Whenever an agricultural play was put on the stage we made it a



religious duty to see it at least once or twice for a rapturous study of its verisimilitude, or lack of it. But, in truth, I cared nothing for farming since being initiated into its mysteries. I cared not if all the crops failed, because, no matter how signally they fail, the city markets are always overstocked. I did not care if the whirlwinds tore the topknot foliage off the turnips of Russia, or the beans from the gaunt and scrawny poles; or if the rain washed all the earth from about the carrots, and invited the inexperienced son-in-law of toil to hammer them in like spikes; or if the dry spell cracked crevices in the geese until they could not take to the water without filling and sinking. I could sit in my air-tight, snow-proof flat, and puff the room full of delicate wreaths of smoke from a tobacco so spicy that it would be difficult for me to believe that it ever grew in the country, for the reason that in the rural districts I had never found

any fit for use in a corn-cob pipe. And while I looked in the airy clouds of tobacco smoke I could see the man of windmills undergoing a series of misfortunes too sad to be bodied forth in a word-picture.

I would be perfectly willing to do my farming in the future at the corner grocery, where the finest specimens of everything desirable and green could always be had on application, and where a crop failure would ever be an unknown quantity. There I could find the pumpkin in its natural state, or formulated



into a savory open-faced pie; I could pluck the carrot without disturbing the dreamy repose of the small of my back; I could gather chickens without a chase, and apples without a pole; and could silently and serenely contemplate the cabbage exposed to public view with a retail price on its head.



My luxurious lounge, covered with a flowered Persian rug, would be the flower bank into which I could sink with a sweeter forgetfulness than I ever knew on nature's sward. And there I could dream and dream—when not engaged in a mad pursuit after the seven cents necessary to balance the books of Smith, Smith, & Smith—and wander in fancy by the margins of lispig runnels befringed with dewy flowers, and gently sloping meadows sweet with the songs

of birds. I could see the sun rise majestically above the wood, responsive to the crowing of the lordly Shanghai, and observe it set with a

broad, self-satisfied grin behind the old Dutch windmill, and the latter dreaming in Sphinx-like calm with its lazy arms asleep against the orange west. I could dream of even the unmortgaged farm being the home of the free—because the farmer is independent—and the home of the slave—because the farmer is not independent, except in the imagination of the poet. And from these pleasant visions I could wake, and observe, as a lasting memento of our experience at Dove's Nest, perched upon a bust of Greeley just above my oaken writing-desk, as white as Aphrodite's squab, and grinning right back to the glass eyes of the taxidermist, the one lone solitary Pekin duck, and hear Spot bark playfully at it. And curled in a pleasant heap of comfort I could then regard myself as contented and happy as an English lord—when he wins an American girl—which happy consummation seems to be of the average English nobleman's desire the chief particular



END.

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